

Mark Schultz
Associate Director, Land Stewardship Project
Narrator

Ron Kroese
Interviewer

September 21, 2015

Mark Schultz—MS
Ron Kroese—RK

Part I

RK: It's September 21, 2015, and today I'm interviewing Mark Schultz, associate director of Land Stewardship Project (LSP). So, Mark, the way I'd like to start this off is to ask everybody interviewed, since so many people come from such diverse backgrounds—what made you interested in becoming a farm organizer? But, going all the way back to your youth, how did you get interested? Why did you take this path, which you've been on for quite awhile—how long have you been with Land Stewardship Project?

MS: Yeah, well, Ron, I came out of Land Stewardship Project in January of '87, and I left for a little while, and somebody gave me a fishing vest and said—you were the one that got away, but maybe we'll get you back, and I did come back, but you know my family was very involved in community, both the Catholic Church we grew up in and in community organization. My folks were leaders in community organization, around a lot of issues including segregation, unfair housing, red-lining—those kinds of issues, which was because I grew up on the South Side of Chicago. So the idea that people, when they work together, can make a difference was just part and parcel of what we believed. But also that—what are we here for? That what we do on this earth matters and that the gifts that we are given are to be given back to the world. So those things I didn't know from, I didn't know from yea-high that I wanted to be an organizer or anything like that, but they were a part of being brought up, and, I mean, you know Steve O'Neil, who ...

RK: Yeah.

MS: I mean, Ron, you hired me and you hired Steve O'Neil ...

RK: That's right.

MS: ... for Land Stewardship Project, and in hiring Steve, you hired one great organizer and person. And funny thing about Steve, of course, is he comes from the South Side of Chicago, too. And even though we didn't know it at the time that we interviewed at the Land Stewardship Project office in Stillwater, we quickly connected our families and for the last maybe 20 years of their lives, his father and my father were best friends. But they knew each other back from the Civil Rights Movement. So the South Side Chicago is an organizing city. There are active

community organizations. People know you got to do that. So there was that context and there was the faith context. And I tell people, when they ask why do I do it, I do this because of what I believe about the future, and also about what I'm rooted in terms of a faith that says what we do on this earth matters. We're here to build the kingdom. We need to be clear about that.

RK: Well, you've touched on what, as you were talking it reminded me that today happens to be the first day that Pope Francis is in the United States.

MS: Oh, yeah, yeah.

RK: And a man who has really been stirring things up, and, in his own way, organizing, you might say, around faith.

MS: Yes.

RK: And you were raised in the Catholic Church, both you and Steve.

MS: Yeah, I was raised in the same Catholic Church Pope Francis is, but I had my doubts about the previous one. So, yeah, no, what he is bringing, and especially ... not only, but especially that consciousness about the earth itself. You know, the start of Land Stewardship Project, "Strangers and Guests" from the Midwest Catholic bishops said—and "The Land: God's giving and Our Caring," from the American Lutheran Church, that idea that this is about stewardship, and that stewardship is both about ... you know what I always say is if all the land was owned by one owner, but it was kept so beautifully well, that would not be the height of stewardship, because stewardship is like love—it's in the giving and in the receiving. So the more people who are involved in stewardship, the more that value is really heightened. And that's why we've always said how many people actually have access to land and work the land and have some long-term tenure with the land, that's a really important part, too.

But, going back to the background—I understood organizing a little bit. I mean, just kind of saw it and knew about it, and I went away to college, and I thought I'd go to law school or something like that, and I kind of got disabused of that notion. I felt like I needed to do something more with people whose voices weren't being heard, rather than be somebody who rose through the ranks, try to be somebody who rose, kind of that we would work together. And literally in May of my senior year of college I woke up, I stood up, and I said—"I'm going to be an organizer." And I wasn't agonizing over the decision. It just came that that was the way to work with people so that their voices were being lifted up, and together they'd work and make a difference. Of course, I didn't know exactly how to get a job or anything like that. So I've been an organizer since that day.

RK: Would you talk a little bit about—you know I always hear about... I know that this is right—that there has at least been an influence from Saul Alinsky in the style of organizing. Steve used to talk to me about that. I'd like to get a little bit about that on the record. What does it mean to be trained by a Saul Alinsky or that school of organizing?

MS: Yeah. There's been a lot of further development to the schools of organizing that have built on Alinsky and gone further, but the basic idea that I hold, and I think Steve did, too, is that it's the idea of a people's organization. And I often describe LSP as a people's organization. It's one in which the people who are directly affected by issues identify the problem, identify opportunities, identify the solutions, decide how to go about attacking the problem or winning the solution, provide the leadership for that work, actually do the work, not just the strategy but the work. And own the wins that come. And so that's what an organizer really needs to pay attention to in a people's organization. LSP does that, and you know of other organizations that do as well. And all of that comes directly out of that Alinsky school, where he talked about community organizations as people's organizations. So that's the main thing. The other thing is about power. So, actually, we have lots of good ideas, Ron—you know this—about sustainable agriculture policy, or what would make for a sustainable food and ag system. It's not for lack of ideas that we don't have that. It has to do with power. So you need to build the power to win the changes and to hold them, implement them, and make this land better.

RK: So then did you, when you decided that day to become an organizer, how did you work your way to Land Stewardship Project?

MS: Despite being from the South Side of Chicago, my brother, my oldest brother, Paul, who was very active in the '60s and early '70s in a number of social movements, he became an organic farmer in southwestern Michigan, and so by the time I graduated from college in 1980, there was a farm, they were making organic and natural ciders and juices from the orchards on the farm, and I went out and lived with him and his wife, and their two young kids, and read a lot of books and picked apples and made cider and drove truck and worked farmers' markets and lived in a small rural community of Lawrence, Michigan. And I loved it. I didn't necessarily think I was going to stay there forever, but I said, "Wow." And then you know what? By the time I was leaving there, there were five jobs that he had created—not he, but they were created through this work. So it was good rural development. You could see a future for this—this was actually an answer. But at the end of that time I moved out east to be closer to Jeannette, who is now my wife, and I worked in Trenton, New Jersey. That was my first organizing job, fighting displacement of low-income people, because of gentrification, and winning some good battles, which also had to do with land, a land trust, how a community could use a land trust to keep housing affordable. But then Jeannette and I decided that we wanted to live in the Midwest, which I thought, of course, meant Chicago. And she had to tell me no, I'm moving anywhere but Chicago. So we drew a circle around the city of Chicago, one day's drive, and said we'll look for work anywhere within there so we can be close. And then I took off on an eight-week's cross-country trip with my best buddy, Hank, and Jeannette found a job in Minneapolis with the Friends for a Non-Violent World, a Quaker peace organization. So that eventually brought me up here in April of 1983. I worked in various jobs, but mostly with INFACT, which was mostly with the Nestle boycott, and then the General Electric boycott. So I built on organizing skills, specifically around corporate accountability. But when we were ready to have our first child, our daughter, Ruth, I was on the road a lot, not just even like on either coast, or a long way away. I wanted to change that, so I started looking for work, spent about three weeks looking at job ads, got discouraged, thought maybe I'd sell fish at a fish shop or something like that, something benign, and Jeannette sees this ad in the paper and says something like, "—or something like that. And she said, "Well, what about this job?" And I'm like—must be a canvassing job. I've

already done that. That's OK, but I don't want to do any more of it. And she's like—well, no—it's Land Stewardship Project, and it's under organizing. I said—it's under organizing—really? So I call up and get an interview, and who's sitting there but you and Steve O'Neil, and anyway it was a good match. I remember that interview very well. You had a couple of questions provided, and one of the things that I think both you and Steve liked is when you were asking the question how I would organize around ag concerns, I said, "Well, first I would ask the farmers involved or the other local people involved what to do about that. And so that idea that our solutions are grounded in the land and the people on the land. It was really Jeannette not giving up so easy, and then us making, finding common ground.

RK: I remember that it was a quite easy decision, and especially with Steve there, really feeling the need to get another organizer, and by then, I really learned the importance and the fundamental need for a strong organization is to be built around organizing people with the values and approaches that you've outlined. And I was really educated about Steve about that, so you just fit into that vision.

MS: Yeah, Steve was a mentor to a lot of people. We lost a good guy when he died two years ago. But, yeah, so that first campaign was this campaign—now people are going to remember, this was the end of 1986, but the '80s farm crisis is still in full crunch, been going on for a few years, and people were losing their farms, and farmland ownership was getting consolidated. And the land, when it gets consolidated, all too often, in the common cases, it gets used too hard; it gets abused. And Land Stewardship Project had identified that large-scale, the big life insurance companies—John Hancock and Mutual Benefit and Travelers and Metropolitan Life, they had these big ag portfolios, because it was a good investment to show that they had the collateral to pay off on any life insurance policies. So they were investing in real estate through mortgages, and then Prudential was actually going out and buying a bunch of farm land. So Land Stewardship had the Farmland Investor Accountability Program that Steve had led to hold the insurance companies accountable when they were tearing up conservation practices, causing huge soil loss and water contamination, and working to make sure that they were caring for the land better and offering the land back in just ways to either the previous farmer or to another family farm. So that's the job I got hired into and I remember going down into Wabasha County and meeting all these Land Stewardship Project folks, but within a month I was organizing in southwestern Iowa on a John Hancock foreclosure. We were in Leon, Iowa, which is a county seat, and we got the sheriff and the John Hancock rep to meet, to get with the former owners and with Steve, inside, just before the sheriff's sale that day, right, minutes before. So Steve says to me—OK, we've got a hundred people out front. We had organized a big turnout and protest. He said, "Keep them there and keep them jazzed up. I've got to do the negotiations." So he shoves me out the door, and here's Mark Schultz—there's a picture of me, I think—it's one of those small pictures where I'm a little stick figure on it, but I still think you can see my mouth wide open, trying to keep people interested. But Land Stewardship Project's willingness to fight foreclosures, as well as to develop better ways of farming or to work with farmers on that—that combination of things has really been powerful in our history, and people noted it. So people who were part of the family farm movement and fought those foreclosures, and who organized for a price for corn and soybeans—a price. In those days our organization thought—that's probably not the thing that's going to solve this problem. We argued for (focusing on) other kinds of problems, kind of the beginning of green programs, you know. So there was that divide,

pretty harsh divide, between what could have been one movement felt like two—family farms and sustainable ag. But LSP, over the years, has been an incredibly important bridge, because we stand for justice and we stand for stewardship, and we were willing to do the tough fight against a factory farm or hard hit on an insurance company in a foreclosure. But at the same time we're saying the way farming happens has to change; it can't be corn and beans forever. That, in and of itself, on the land is one of the things that's killing us. I mean, I just think from back in the '80s when you founded, when you and Victor Ray founded Land Stewardship, those twin principles of how the land is cared for and who will own the land have really carried forward in powerful ways.

RK: Before we move on, too, I also wanted to say one of the allies we had at that time, and I wanted to get that on the record, was Paul Wellstone.

MS: Oh, yeah.

RK: Maybe you need to talk a little bit about that.

MS: So Paul won his first senatorial campaign in 1990, but he was already a supporter of Land Stewardship Project—I don't know, from the beginning or shortly thereafter. He helped stop foreclosures or stand up, and current LSP organizer, Paul Sobocinski, right there with him. But in 1988 we started a steering committee of LSP supporters in the Rice County area, called the Farmland Stewardship Committee, and Paul was a member of that local committee, along with Bob Duban and Elwood Lips, and Margaret Langworthy.

RK: Paul?...

MS: Paul Wellstone—sorry—Paul Wellstone was a member of that, because he's from Northfield. And, you know, I've just got to say, we were taking on Traveler's Insurance. We won in that insurance campaign, the Farmland Investor Accountability Campaign, we won about 75 or 80 percent of what we were going for. By the end of it, the insurance companies had signed agreements about what they were going to do, supported by federal policy, but we were moving them ahead of federal policy. But it took local campaigns. We did a direct action on a Travelers office in Wayzata, here west of the Twin Cities. There was only about eight of us, but Wellstone was in that group, and there's an iconic LSP photo with Dale Snedrud, a farmer, on the phone behind one of these desks at the Travelers office, because they had deserted the office when we took over with eight people, calling the vice president of ag investments for Travelers Insurance and saying "we need to meet." He's like, "Where are you calling from?" "Your office in Wayzata." But this photo—it's got Patrick Moore and Jim Blaha holding up—*Our soil, Our Farmers. Our Future.* Big sign. And I'm in the picture and Dale's on the phone. The photo was taken by Paul Wellstone. And it's this great photo. Two other things about Paul Wellstone—one, in all the time that he was on that committee, for about two years, in all that time, he never grandstanded, never used his oratorical genius to take over a meeting. He knew organizing, so he was playing the role of a leader, and the only time he ever did that, it was like absolutely needed, and he did it perfectly. And I really gained a lot of respect from that. He and I argued over the years, especially when he became senator, you know, but he was great. And what a loss when we lost him. But, yeah.

RK: Well, thank you. I'd like to, now, maybe move then. You've already started touching on this, but, as you know, so much of what NSAWG (National Sustainable Agriculture Working Group) and NSAC (National Sustainable Agriculture Campaign) are about is federal policy, so I'd like to get you talking about how you became involved with the Midwest SAWG and how that evolved and what were some of the early issues that were moved through in the federal policy arena, and even some of the early farmer fly-ins that I've talked to Ferd (Hoefner) about, get you on that track a little bit.

MS: So, of course, Ron, you carried, kind of, that portfolio as the executive director of Land Stewardship Project. Until, I guess it was probably '94, I think 1994.

RK: I think it was of '93.

MS: End of '93, when you took that sabbatical, and I remember you saying, "Hey, we should sit down; I want to talk to you about this." You said, "I'm going on sabbatical, and I want to ask you to pick up this policy work". And at the time I was actually doing this metro farm project piece, and it was more about farmland preservation around the Twin Cities. I did the early CSA organizing in the region, along with others, along with Dan Guenther and Anne deMeurisse and Verna Kragness. So you were talking to me about this policy, and, you know, there is this thing with organizers. A lot of organizers, community organizers, think—well, maybe we'll win a law, but, it's like—those politicians, you know. I think we (organizers) think a little bit different about it. We need to have power in that sphere, but I had never really worked that much on any laws. And I thought about it, and I thought—well, I'm an organizer. I said, "Ron, we might need to do some lobbying, but I'm not a lobbyist, and we might need to develop or analyze some policy. I'm not a policy analyst, I'm an organizer. So if we do this, then what I want to do is build a program that's led by our members and becomes like, 'what do they really think we need?' And push for it, and then we'll figure out how to do the lobbying and the developing of policy." And you were like, "that sounds good to me." So shortly after that we held our first... I went around and I recruited some staunch LSP farmer-members. We were becoming a membership organization right about that same time—Jennifer Rupperecht, Bob Duban, Dan French, Paul Homme. For our first federal LSP Federal Farm Policy Steering Committee. We met at the Country Kitchen. If you go down 52 just on the north side of Cannon Falls, that's where that first meeting was. We started talking about, well, OK, this is the decision-making group. What are going to be our priorities? We were going to be talking with our board, of course, but this is where the digging in went in, and thinking about what should LSP be for, and how will we work on this? And then, frankly, the first couple of years after that, the '96 farm bill was there, and we were basically just mobilizing or activating according to what, basically, the NSAC strategy was. And that was good. But about after that farm bill, the committee—it had grown to about eight or nine people at that point. Sister Kathleen Storms got on it at one point, from the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Other than that it's always been farmers. And they started saying, "You know, we really have just been mostly reacting, either against some bad stuff, or just to get on board some things that other people have thought up that seemed good. And while we might still need to do that, what we need to do is really think—what is going on in agriculture? What would be policy that would actually support the growth of a sustainable food and agriculture system that would flow up from sustainable farms, and, in turn, federal policy that would support its further

growth?" It was like—OK, I'm willing to think about how we start thinking about that. So we spent 1997 really just kind of thinking about that problem. We had outside speakers in—just for the committee. We did reading, we had people just talk about their ideas. Dwight Ault was on that committee, too. You know, the idea of full-cost accounting was weighing pretty heavily in. People were saying—I don't know that payment limits on commodity programs—I mean, that's kind of good, but you still have the commodity programs. You still are awarding money based on the maximum yields of just a handful of crops. What's a sustainable farm policy look like? So at the end of '97, it was like late November, the committee said—you know what we need? We need to write our own farm bill. And I'm about ready to say—no, and everybody was like—yeah, that's exactly it! You bet, yeah! Let's write our own farm bill. And I'm like—a farm bill, it's this thick! [Chuckles] As an organizer, I'm fighting my best instincts to tell them. "You're all crazy; we can't do that!" to saying, "This is leadership speaking here." And then a great leader who has come up through our organization, Dave Serfling—who I think you know a little bit, Dave says, "Well, I'll take a crack at it." Now Dave—one of the great things about this committee—they were all farmers, and Sister Kathleen Storms, but they ranged the political spectrum from further Libertarian and Republican to liberal to progressive DFLer. I didn't necessarily know how everybody voted, but, I mean, in terms of that kind of spectrum, that was there in the committee. The debate was across that spectrum. And people, you know, moderates, in the middle. So Dave had come in as ... he was somebody who had been his whole life a Republican, and he says he'll do this. But he had been studying some farm policy, he was getting a master's or something, and he was a wonderful farmer. Just conservation, he got into grazing. He loved hog farming, and he had pasture farrowing and he was always figuring out, he was very good at financial management. He was in it to be able to make a good living for his family, but really care for the land. And so he comes back to the next meeting and he's got an eight-page farm bill. [Chuckles] It was called the *Farm Results Index*. And it was a little more complicated than this, but the basic idea was the real, the legitimate rationale for public investment in agriculture is that it produced public good. Whether that's clean drinking water or it's food security or it's jobs, or ... let's look at it. OK, if we invest, it needs to be for the public good. So he took a pretty full swatch at that. He looked at it and said—yes, that means conservation and environment, and it also means what's going to help family farmers stay on the land. It also means what's going to build the economy of rural communities, and it's going to mean wildlife does well. So we took that, we debated it, we kind of kept it together, and we added a few pieces to it. We created a piece called *The Tilt Against Stewardship*. My personal high-water mark in computer graphics is putting the word "tilt" on an angle on that piece of paper. So we were showing how, if you wanted to grow corn or beans, or if you wanted to build a big confinement hog facility, there was plenty of public money. But if you actually wanted to have a diversified crop rotation or move into more grass and forages, you didn't have that public support—the tilt against stewardship. So we did a couple of other sort of fact sheets on it, and then we had a cover sheet that just laid it out, and we decided we'd go to Washington. And so LSP organized, in conjunction with NSAC, so flowing this together, right? Because this was now the startup to what became the 2002 farm bill. But it was February of 1998, and we brought 14 farmers to Washington, actually from five states. Most were from Minnesota, but Illinois and Iowa and Nebraska.

RK: Wisconsin?

MS: And Wisconsin, yeah. And we flew to Washington, and the first half-day—I don't know, from like two o'clock until ten o'clock, we went through the whole document, and we made changes with the group of 14. Not huge changes, because as people understood it, they also had like—well, this would make it even better—and if people agreed, we did that. So then I stayed up until three o'clock in the morning with Brad DeVries, who was on our staff but working in DC at the time, and we changed all the documents to incorporate that. The next morning we spent the half-day going through 44 scheduled visits that we had on the Hill. And we divvied up with that team of fourteen, plus me, and Ferd Hoefner came to a number of those meetings, and Ferd was in the meeting with the farmers. So he was part of this whole thing. It was an NSAC fly-in that we organized. And we decided—well, these three people go ... you're going to visit that senator—Senator Harkin, Senator Grassley, Senator Dayton, Senator Wellstone. And what are the main points to talk to that senator or rep about? Or their staff, if that's who you were meeting with. How are we going to make it? What else do we need? And then we just did the whole run-through. And then we went out for pretty much a day-and-a-half, all these different teams of people, and conducted 44 Hill visits. Came back, debriefed, reported, and the thing that came out of that, not only ... that's the model we use for all of our fly-ins now. It's tremendous leadership development, and it's tremendous, sort of, grass roots democracy, too. People have a say in what this is. And it's a tremendous way to add value to NSAC. So it's not just all emanating out of DC, but what we bring to DC. It's a really wonderful model, but the meeting with Harkin, there was actually five of us in that meeting. And Senator Harkin at that time was the chair of the Senate ag committee, by a razor-thin margin. It was 50 to 49 to one independent. It was siding with the Democrats at the time. Well, Senator Harkin was really taken with this idea, this idea that public payments ought to be based on the public good they create. And we talked quite a bit about the conservation benefits of that. You know, how to measure conservation benefits, and that with other programs like the CRP, Conservation Reserve Program—conservation had basically meant for the previous 15 years taking land out of production and setting it aside. Sometimes that's a good tool, but it diminishes economic activities in communities, and it's not always the best conservation tool either. And then there was this new program, EQIP, which we had high hopes for at the time, which has been a mixed bag, but in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, but that was really cost-share to fix a problem. Or maybe if you had a system you were doing this to add a piece. But what we wanted to get at was a program that would reward farmers for the conservation benefits they produced by the way they farmed on working farmland. And that became the Conservation Security Program that Senator Harkin introduced four months later, and became a big fight in the 2002 farm bill, which we won. It was passed and implemented, and then in 2008 greatly expanded.

RK: That's when the name changed, too, right?

MS: Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), yes. Now it's really interesting, and just for history's sake, Senator Harkin was fighting an uphill battle to win the Conservation Security Program in 2002. Farmers Union and other groups were weighing in, all the Democrats, to raise the loan rates and to do the stuff with the commodity program so farmers get more for raising corn and beans. And the Republicans were either doing that or trying to ... I mean, they were doing all kinds of stuff, including trying to kill the idea that government should have anything to say about farm policy. And here's Harkin saying—no, we could actually have a conservation policy that would lead to the creation of public good through the way people farm. So there was

this one knock-down drag-out Senate Democrat caucus in 2001, late 2001, where Harkin was attacked by just about all the Democratic U.S. senators for carrying the Conservation Security Program, for being a champion. Just saying—this is not what we need. We need more money on the loan rates and, you know, who are you? Just because you're chair you're doing this. There were only two senators who stood up for him that day. One was Paul Wellstone. One was Debbie Stabenow, who is the current ag chair, largely because of the diversification of crops in Michigan, Senator Mark Dayton, I'm sorry to say, did not. So we did an action alert from little old LSP that asked all of our members to call Senator Wellstone and thank him for standing up for the Conservation Security Program and stay the course. And to call Senator Dayton, who was also officially a co-sponsor, to get on the stick and support and push through the Conservation Security Program. So we gave both phone numbers and fax, and for Senator Dayton we gave his fax number, so we totally burned down their fax machine. It just blew up. So I get a hot call from Senator Dayton's ag aide in Washington. "Senator Dayton is a co-sponsor—what are you doing? I've seen the flyer! You're saying thank-you to Wellstone and you're saying to call and fax us." I said, like—"Well, do you support full funding for the Conservation Security Program—can we tell our members that you're going to do it and you're going to fight for that?" Just silence. "Well, until you can answer that yes..." "Well, I'd have to talk to my boss." "Well, talk to him. As soon as you can say yes, we'll turn it off. Hangs up the phone." They actually called us back the next day and said—we're on. So it's not the biggest story, but that's how counter-cultural the Conservation Security Program was. It was a program that actually came from sustainable ag. It wasn't reform bad industrial ag policy to make it a little less worse. It was an idea that said how people farm matters, and that we can actually care for this land through good stewardship, and that's where public dollars ought to go. So we were really proud of our role in the initial, sort of, formation of that idea and the development of the policy in winning it and then in subsequent years in really working with farmers to sign up and implement new conservation and farming systems on their land, and to use it. Minnesota's the number one state in the nation for using the Conservation Stewardship Program, in acreages and in number of farmers using it. And it's a program that's got a strong payment limit of \$45,000, so it spreads its benefit across many farms, not to be captured just by a few. So Ferd, I am sure, has talked to you. I mean, others had a big role to play. Obviously one state, one region doesn't win a national policy, but having that kind of grassroots, community-based, farmer-based organized, willing, occasionally, to really hit hard if need be, to combine with the day-in, day-out lobbying and education going on in DC. And then through NSAC across a larger coalition. That's a winning construct. We can win big policy.

RK: That was a very good description of that program. Is there another one you'd like to talk about, or two? I'd like to hear about a couple more, too.

MS: Yeah.

RK: I know you've been involved with several of these efforts.

MS: You know, I guess the strategic aim—so the way we think about doing public policy, one is—will it do something good for the earth, for the land, and for farmers and for all of us? Is it going to be a good thing? But beyond that, it's like—what's the strategic game, meaning because you won that, now you can actually win larger victories. On CSP it was that idea of moving to working lands and to the outcomes, not to get money to factory farms, to mitigate their pollution,

but to support the kinds of agriculture that are actually producing solutions by the way they farm. So that was the strategic ... it was conceptual, new kind of policy, and then the idea that it would be for family-sized farms, \$45,000 payment limit. As we entered into the 2008 farm bill ... so, in 2005-06, clearly one of our main objectives had NSAC and within LSP was going to be to further expand that, the Conservation Stewardship Program. But at the same time, LSP, we have a Farm Beginnings Program, where we are doing a lot of direct education, training, and assistance to people who want to farm. And, of course, there were programs with the same ends, literally in every state in the country. And they were all kind of struggling. There was ... hard to raise the money, to really have the staffing, or to have a consistent program, year after year. And the foundations that had supported beginning farmer training, you know, they did it for a few years, or maybe more than a few years, but not ... another thing—we can't just keep funding this one thing. So one of the solutions to that is public funding, because there's a lot of money that we the people put into our government for what we hope are good ends. So Ferd, of course, has been a long-time champion. Ferd and NSAC or SAWG, MSAWG, SAC, NSAC, have been long-time leaders nationally on beginning farmer issues, right? But the lynch pin that we saw, or a key piece, was the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program. BFRDP—rolls off the tongue now. Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, which would provide, it would be a competitive grant system that would provide grants to community-based or university beginning farmer programs to really help people get started training, education assistance. So we at LSP looked at it and said ... the law had been passed in the previous farm bill, setting up a beginning farmer program, but the money had not been allocated, so it was useless. I mean, the door had been opened, but nobody was getting through the door. So we talked within NSAC, and we said LSP can lead an organizing effort, in organizing parlance, the field campaign, to really build the organized push to pass this program and put money into it while NSAC staff would do the work in DC, working on the Hill. And we would also fly in, etc. So we constructed a plan. We called it the "quick first step." It was our quick first step strategy. Now, it comes from basketball. So in basketball you got the big lunking center, and then you might have that speedy little guard on the other team, and for the little guy, and to win, they got to have a real quick first step. They got to get around that center to the basket before the center can swat them away. Well, in this image, the center, the big lunking center, that's the land grant universities. Because we're going to pass this and put it in the USDA, this beginning farmer, but this Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program would be the part of USDA, pretty much controlled by the land grant universities. So they're just going to look at it and say—this is ours, unless we build the power to make that program for community-based organizations, more than for land grants. So LSP conducted 21 one-to-one visits with other community-based beginning farmer programs, literally from California to Massachusetts, and from Arkansas to North Dakota. And a couple of things—we said what does this program need to look like to be of use to you? And they told us. And so we made a few ... we had it pretty well lined up by then. Ferd had worked on it, etc. But there were a few slight shifts at that point. But then it was like, you know, this program is going to be of no use to you unless we win the money and people know that it was groups like yours that won the money. And, meaning, you got your member of Congress to be a champion for it. And that you, then, immediately helped shape up the request for proposals that would come out once we get it funded, and you fill them out, and you send them in and you get funded. And then, there's a sort of adage in federal policy—the people who use the program, they have a little bit of an ownership stake in the program. They're the ones being asked—is it working? you know. So quick first step—well, it worked. It worked because all of these groups started. We built a list of

a hundred groups. We only visited twenty-one, but started, really, advocating for this. A lot of these groups had never advocated for a political, for a policy piece before. And then our second part was to get the chair of the House ag committee, who had never been supportive of this—I mean, Senator Harkin, still on the ag committee, he was a big champion of this bill. That’s why there was a bill. But Colin Peterson, when the Democrats controlled the House, he was not a fan of this. Well, in 2002 there was a redistricting of the congressional districts across the country, and the Seventh Congressional District that Colin Peterson’s in went a lot further south than what it had been. What that meant is he got LSP. He got Montevideo and Granite Falls and Litchfield. We did an organizing program, four years’ organizing program, three at least, in his district, called Many Faces, Many Places, where we just would do meetings with this chair of the ag committee or ranking Democrat, depending on the year, with different members of his constituencies. Sometimes the same ones, but always different ones. Never, always in the same place; always in a different town or farm or whatever. And we just hammered on him about conservation and about beginning farmers, and about corporate concentration of the livestock industry. Well, you know, Colin, I think he’s an excellent politician. He’s like, there’s a lot of these folks, they’re organized, so they have some power, and you know what? What they say I may not always agree with, but it actually makes sense, it holds together, and they follow through. So I think it’s going to be a lot better for me if I say—sure, I can go with that, than to fight it. Why have a fight over this? They’re asking for a hundred million dollars—I can do that. That’s how we won. Plus, Colin started beginning to see beginning farms in his own district. It wasn’t just the political calculation, it was the people. So Colin Peterson ends up putting in the money, and we ... this is the truth—we were in Colin’s office, and we didn’t have a meeting set with him this time. And it was in his office in DC. I can’t remember who the people—it was just, it was me, there were three or four of us. I think Adam Wartheson was there, and we had two members of our committee. And we sat down with his staff and we said—hey, we would like you to put in a hundred million—I think it was a hundred million dollars over five years for this Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program—will you do that? No. We still want you to do that, but we also want you to put in that twenty-five percent of the funds will go to socially disadvantaged community-based organizations working with socially disadvantaged. No. We want it to say that the priority for the spending is to community-based organizations and NGOs, not land grants. No. And then there was another thing on a value-added producer grants where we wanted some language. No. We have four straight nos. Right at that point Colin walks through his office. The door was left open. He sees us in the room, he says—hey, come on in the office. We go into his office, ask him the same four things, we got four yeses. [Chuckles]

RK: I hadn’t heard that story.

MS: That’s true. And you know, that’s why you have representatives, not just staff. They’re the ones who know their district. The others know Washington, but they actually know their district. And he was going to say yeah. So, that was a big win, because not only did it say the money was going to be there, it ended up being seventy-five million over four years that we got. But this idea that the priority would be given to community-based organizations was huge, and the socially disadvantaged farmers. So now you had something that was addressing racial inequities, in terms of who will own the land. You had something that was building the power base of our movement, because the money would go to community-based organizations. Frankly, that was a big reason why LSP did this. If we can actually build the capacity of 150 more organizations

across the country who are now working with more and more farmers, because they actually have decent funding to do it, well, those farmers are going to say—hey, now I got a problem with this. Or—here, this kind of policy is really screwing with me now. So you start building the capacity of the movement. So it was as much for that as for the hundred million dollars that we did it. So with the money and the social disadvantaged farmers—that largely means farmers of color—and with the community base, it was a big win. And, of course, Senator Harkin was totally behind it, but Peterson put the money in. So then another thing about policy—and, again, I'm sure Ferd sees the same thing, and others at NSAC, but on the one hand you have to develop the policy, the ideas and how is it going to work. Then you have to pass it. Big mistake if you stop there, right? You know that. So if you stop there they might implement it and they might not. They might just let it die and never implement it. Oh, we just never got to it. Or they might implement it in a way that actually is against you, for the wrong purposes, to the wrong ends. So implementation is a key part of this. And then we've built a fourth thing—development, passage, implementation, usage. So who uses it, like I said, then—with CSP, the most important constituency for the Conservation Stewardship Program are the farmers that are in the Conservation Stewardship Program. So the idea that you push the usage of the program is incredibly important for its viability in the future. The same thing with BFRDP, so we had to make sure that community-based organizations were using it. There was a great set of community-based organizations proposals into the first year of BFRDP. The implementation looked strong, but the first year they gave the lion's share of the money and the lion's share of the grants to the land grant universities. So we had to raise—NSAC and LSP together—had to raise holy hell. So Ferd said no, I think we can do something about this. So Darwyn Bach, from our Federal Farm Policy Committee and myself and another federal policy staffer and Ferd sat down with the undersecretary for research education at USDA and the other people responsible for the area of USDA that would have these grants. Sitting next to me was the current head of NIFA (National Institute of Food and Agriculture). His name was Roger Beachy. He came directly to USDA out of a Monsanto-funded research shop. He was a corporate guy. And we had kind of a, it was a good meeting. It was heated, but not over the top, at times. It was also full of information. At one point we just had to say—look, Congressional intent is for community-based organizations, the groups that won this are for community-based organizations. The people who are going to make sure that new farmers get started are not the land grants. They can help, but they were in charge of this for years and years and years and years, and they helped to usher people out. What we need is, alongside the land grant, we need a community-based structure that's grounded in the community where beginning farmers get community support that's not going away, and that's the winning strategy, and so for the next three years we won it. The next three years the lion's share of the money went to community-based organizations.

RK: Yeah, that's an important part of the story.

MS: You bet. Because, if we had not followed through with NSAC, and an NSAC member group had not taken responsibility, this money would all be (unclear). Now we got to work ... we kind of have the same problem right now. It kind of flared up again just this year. So we're needing to talk to USDA again. Congressman Tim Walz has been a big advocate of that program, and he was willing to help us on that one.

[End of Part One]

Part II, December 3, 2015, Minneapolis

RK: Today is December 3, 2015, and I am at the Land Stewardship Project office, Ron Kroese. I am visiting today with Mark Schultz, who is policy director for the Land Stewardship Project, and this is our Part Two. We had a good interview a couple weeks ago, and we're doing Part Two today. So, Mark, I'd like to have you talk a little bit more about the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Act and some of what it has accomplished. Anything more you want to say about that?

MS: Yeah. Well, you know, it's a competitive grants program and directed with a priority to community-based organizations by act of Congress. We fought and won that. And, as I mentioned, we have had to hold USDA somewhat accountable to that, but, for the most part, they have done that. The last year or two we have been in continued conversation with them to make sure the intent of Congress is followed there. It looks like the initial returns on the most recent set of grants is good that way. And why that's important, it's important for two reasons that the money is going to community-based organizations. One is that's effective use of our dollars, of public dollars, when farmers are not just getting either some kind of expert opinion divorced from the community and from the land that they are going to be farming, but instead are there and are getting the help of local farmers, people who know the weather and the land—that's the effective ... and it's a community of support, of other young farmers and of established farmers and of bankers and of other ag professionals in the community, who are invested in that community. So it's critically important that that focus, that priority on community-based organizations is continued to be followed in the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program. And, of course, we were able to get Representative Colin Peterson to put that ... that was coming from his office after hearing from beginning farmers in western Minnesota. But the other reason is more of the kind of the social change reason. So, in addition to effective training, support, assistance, education for beginning farmers, we were interested in building the capacity of community-based organizations who were working with new farmers for a new food system. And that they, through public support, not only built good programs, but a track record of success, more and more, as relationships with local businesses, with your local politicians, etc., and that as they continued to work with beginning farmers that they helped get started, that those beginning farmers begin to say—you know, I'm having a problem with this. Or, I see an opportunity with that. How can we work to make that happen? So they have capacity and our movement builds, the power base of our movement builds, and that's a critical, strategic reason that we said the Farmer and Rancher Development Program, as LSP, is a priority, so that the power grows for further change. We haven't necessarily seen the fruition of all of that yet, but it's early. What has happened is that the capacity of community-based organizations have grown, and they understand a good role of government in helping us get to a better agricultural system. So we're really psyched about that.

RK: So speaking of fruition, one of the things is ... I'd like to talk a little bit about. Is there a demand out there in our young people—when you think of beginning, you tend to think of younger people—able to, with that help, get started in some way in farming?

MS: Yes. You know, I would say that's an emphatic yes. One of the things that we know—there's always some of our members call it the mind game being played. And just, oh, you would

never want to go into farming. Oh, you can't get started farming. Oh, the corporations control everything, so you'd never want to get started in farming. It's played many different ways. And so that weighs on people. You might create an argument against it, but if people kind of believe that a small- or moderate-scale farm will never again exist, then why would they invest their life in that? So you have to lift up an ethic of stewardship, of family farms, of a better, more democratic economy that gives a place for small- and moderate-scale farms. And we've seen a real growth of that, I think. People understand another way is possible. So that does not mean it's easy. It's a lot of hard work, as you know, and everybody should know. Starting a farm and continuing to farm is extremely difficult, even in the best of times. But it's a life worth living, and we're seeing more and more people—our classes, people come to our farm beginnings classes, they get started. I won't say there's not been ever anybody who has stopped, but we have such a base of younger farmers in this region because they've decided they want to get started. As you know, some of them come from long-time, you know, century farms, and fifth-generation farms, and things like that. And some of them are coming in ... well, some of them are new to the country, they're new immigrants. Some of them are, their grandparents may have farmed, but they have been pretty far from it, so it's a real mix.

RK: Well, that reminded me a good deal of work that Land Stewardship's been doing the last couple of years is changing that narrative, and that is part of that narrative.

MS: Yeah, that's right. We understand it as a part of how change happens. If people don't believe change can happen, or that a better world can't be, then they're not going to work for that. But if they actually begin understanding that's a possibility and that they're not alone in believing that, a lot more change is possible. So we're excited about all that.

RK: I always liked that quote: What you can't imagine you can't achieve.

MS: Yes!

RK: And that's really a lot of it.

MS: I haven't been using that one, that's right. I am familiar with the quote, but that fits in exactly, yeah.

RK: Well, thank you. I think we'll move on a little bit now. We've talked about two important programs that Land Stewardship has played a fundamental part in moving forward and continues to monitor and advance. What's next on the horizon as far as a policy priority for the organization?

MS: We're going to stay on conservation and what's going to help new farmers for a new food system to succeed. But one of the main new pieces that we're picking up along within NSAC is really kind of taking on some of the bad policy that's out there that prevents the fruition of a sustainable food and agriculture system, and, in particular, federally subsidized crop insurance. In fact, on Monday and Tuesday, I and three farmers from Land Stewardship Project will be meeting with other NSAC member organizations and NSAC staff in Des Moines for a strategy meeting about really constructing the campaign to win major reform with crop insurance. Now

most people hear crop insurance and you're thinking—well, you know, if a guy gets his crops destroyed by hail, or that woman's vegetables are wiped out because of a drought or something, well, we'd like them to know that they have some ability to recover from that, and public support for them to have crop insurance makes sense. And, of course, that's what the program was. It was a single-payer system. It was a public system, the government ran it, and it was low-cost to help people recover from natural disasters like floods, drought, fire, etc. But about 1981 it was privatized, and it became a program that insurance companies became more and more interested in. Crop insurance companies are owned by bigger corporations, like Wells Fargo and ADM. Farm Bureau owns a crop insurance corporation. So what's evolved is that, in addition to that natural disaster piece, what's actually much—I think it's about seventy-five percent of crop insurance—is called revenue insurance. It's not based on what happened in the weather or a disaster, but rather what happens to prices. And so it's become much more of a business planning for the insurance corporations, as a profit center for them—been very, very profitable for Wells Fargo and ADM—and for the largest operators to sort of game the system. And with more staff and time to be able to plan for how you use programs, they can use those programs to their benefit more than the average farmer can. So, for instance, in western Minnesota there's a county, Yellow Medicine County, and it stretches from the Minnesota River to the South Dakota border. The land by the river, it's river bottom and it's lush land, there's a little more rainfall, the soil is richer, and you can get pretty good yields, like, for instance, on corn—200 bushels an acre or more. As you go west and reach towards the South Dakota border, it's hillier, dryer, thinner soil—really not good for cropping at all. Probably shouldn't be in row crop. You're going to maybe, maybe get 100 bushels per acre per year of corn, for instance. Then, why do it, too—it's going to cause a lot of erosion, lighter soil's hilly. But if a farmer's been farming for 10 years in the river bottom, getting 210 bushels per acre per year, they can get land out on the western edge of the county and insure that 210 bushels per acre per year, plant it, not even pay much attention to it, get 80 bushels per acre a year, and claim a huge loss. And you and I pay for it. Seventy percent of that is paid for by you and I, as the American taxpayers. That's just not right. It's not fair, it's taking money out of the public till, and it's bad for the land. It is going to mean more chemical use, more erosion, and more run-off. So those are the kinds of inequities and problems with it. We also see that crop insurance has really enabled the largest crop operators to basically acquire control over land at almost no risk at all. So if a 240-acre farm comes open down the road, as LSP member Joel Penner was describing to Colin Peterson a few years back when we were talking to him, was Joel's son, Jason, going to be able to get that farm? Or would the big operator, who's getting a million dollars plus in subsidies each year, are they going to snap up that land? Well, crop insurance is one of the mechanisms that means the land keeps going to the biggest operators. We now have 20,000-acre, 30,000-acre farms in Minnesota. Run by some of the biggest operators in the country, and meanwhile mid-sized farms that want to expand a little bit or a beginning farmer who wants to acquire their first farm have very poor access to land.

RK: I've heard from other groups I've talked with another problem is that people that are farming in a more sustainable way, more organic production methods, also have trouble getting insured under this-- what we now tend to call "risk management," rather than crop insurance.

MS: That's right.

RK: Because the risk now covers not only crops but revenue loss, as you pointed out.

MS: That's right. Yeah, so there's been some move, some improvements that are enabling more organic farmers to get better coverage, because that's been inequitable. And we're not quite there yet, but it's getting better. There's a big problem for beginning farmers on this, because they don't have a crop history. So they pay insurance, they have less of their insurance subsidized by the taxpayer, and they can claim less of a loss. Their proven yield is not there. But what we would say is—don't we want beginning farmers? If so, wouldn't we be wanting to subsidize them more to help give them a hand up? What's the purpose of this program? There's a lot to debate within that. I won't go into all the details. There's been some improvement on access, but also there's some inequities that remain. We'd like to see better programs that recognize diversified crop rotations as a risk management strategy, and that, therefore, you get a bonus. You're able to get access to better crop insurance, because you're actually taking steps in the way you farm to be more risk-resilient. Rather than just farming corn and beans forever, you've got those rotations that restore the soil, hold water, guard against the weather, etc.

RK: Without getting too much further in the weeds, then, what's the strategy, briefly? I mean, are you going to try to affect the next farm bill, or what exactly ...?

MS: Yes, so I'd be able to tell you on Wednesday what the strategy is a little more clearly, but what we're seeing is that we want to wage a campaign, one of whose goals would be to effect policy change that deals with conservation impacts of risk management in crop insurance, that deals with the structure of agriculture, land concentration issues, that deals with access, and that deals with the accountability and transparency of the program. Because one of the big programs—and most farmers don't even realize this—is that a huge chunk of the money goes to Wells Fargo and ADM and Farm Bureau—totally unaccountable. That's ... the subsidies that are paid into crop insurance by the public till don't go to the farmers, they go to the insurers. So, there's a huge amount of money, so we want to attack those four areas. On the access front, I think we want to look for how diversified farms that are doing a good job on the land, how their risk management strategies are recognized in the crop insurance program.

RK: Very good. Well, I would like to move the discussion now to—we've heard about some successes and some plans—looking back over your career as an organizer. What are you really disappointed about? What should have happened, or hasn't happened yet, in your view?

MS: Yeah. One of the things that I'll start off with is we, as a movement, a sustainable ag movement—one of the things we teach in organizing is there's a thing called the ladder of power. Down here you're not even on the ladder. You're not even on the radar. You're not considered at all. The first rung, maybe you get a seat at the table, and it's you and 12 people who don't like you very much, and you're just there for show, and you're not actually going to be able to move anything. And then, maybe, you get to the level where you're at the table and you're able to make a deal. You have enough power, you get something. But then there's another rung, where it's being able to make a deal stick. So you made the deal, now does it get fully implemented? Is it fully funded? Does it get whittled away, or does it actually grow? You can keep going up the rungs, but there's a spot where you're setting the agenda. Well, we're somewhere between being able to strike a deal and being able to make a deal stick. The wins we

get out of NSAC and out of our movement, some of them get whittled away. Some of them never get implemented. And to me that's a measure of our power. So we need to ... what I feel like is a lack right now is an assessment of how we're going to build power. We have plenty of good policy ideas. We'll need more ... Well, I won't really say that; ideas are always good, but we have plenty of good ideas. How are we going to build the power to make our ideas not only get to the table, but the deals that we strike stick? So, like, the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)—a lot of work from NSAC was around that, and LSP participated to some degree, but at a certain point the payment caps over who would get payments from this conservation program were basically ripped off, and they became a funnel for hundreds of thousands of dollars a year going to each factory farm that wanted it. It became not just for solving problems of existing factory farms, but actually to construct new factory farms, public dollars in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program going for factory farms. So, like, in a sense, NSAC struck that deal, but was not able to hold on to it. We didn't have the power, and the money was taken for other purposes. There are still good purposes served by the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, or EQIP, but this is an example of a portion of it going the wrong way. Likewise, what happened with Conservation Stewardship Program. We've talked a lot about that, and from the first 2002 farm bill, where it happened in 50 watersheds across the country where this program was, to the expansion in the 2008 farm bill, where it was nation-wide and more money, and became a billion dollar a year conservation program, and then in this last farm bill, severe cuts. Now it's still a large program, and it's a good program, but, like, are we going to be able to make that program stick, or is it just going to be a decline now? Or is it actually going to be twisted and turned to purposes it wasn't meant for?

RK: That's interesting that the cap has stuck on that one, or hasn't it?

MS: The payment limits have stuck, which has been really good.

RK: It is good, but it's also interesting that it sticks on a program that has so much conservation value.

MS: Yeah, I know, I know.

RK: I think it's just interesting that way.

MS: You bet. So I think that thing about the ladder of power and what that says to me is not just an observation. It says that NSAC needs to pay more attention to building power in the states from the ground up. We now have the largest staff we've ever had in Washington. That's all well and good, but we don't necessarily have the ability to move members of Congress from their own districts, to make sure that that cut isn't made, or even better, to actually advance our policy priorities. So that's where I see a lack in NSAC. I think there needs to be better policy analysis and more attention to growing from the ground up. You know, there's a little controversy going around the office here—and I don't know controversy, but—there's a billboard in Iowa put up by ... I think it's by the Iowa Corn Growers, although I'm not sure. It might be by Monsanto. But what it says is—feed the plant, not the soil. And it's this whole thing, what we're all about—let's feed the soil, that's where our future rests, right? Well, in a sense, I want to throw that to NSAC. It's in our communities; it's in the Midwest and the South and the West, and the mountain states,

in the Southeast, in New England. It's in the people, in the farms, in the organizations that they are part of. That's the soil. We need to feed that soil to be yet much more powerful. And then NSAC, the staffing in DC, that's what we can grow to move our agenda. We need to pay more attention to how we're building power in the states.

RK: Well, some of the good folks who I've been talking with do see hope, a potential in the food movement, in the food-to-table movement, in the fact that a lot of urban people, who know little about agriculture, of course, are very interested in where the food comes from and whether they can be organized to move beyond just, sort of, the retail food level to the deeper issues.

MS: Yes. No, this is where it gets interesting. So, you know your history, you know that end of the 1800s and the first couple decades of the 1900s, intense farm organizing, Non-Partisan League and the Farmer-Labor Association, all that became the populist movement, and one of the things that was really critical for that movement was they built power in the economic sphere, as well as in the political sphere. So not only did they elect members of Congress, and almost elect a president once or twice, or a governor of Minnesota, but they built co-ops, big co-ops, that meant farmers could have some options when they sold their grain, or wouldn't get gouged by the railroads. They built production co-ops, or supply co-ops. And for 40 or 50 years that worked. I mean, we have critiques of those same co-ops now, in terms of what they've become. But, you know, if you do something that works for fifty years, that's pretty darned good. What are we going to do with our situation now in the food movement? I don't have the handy-dandy answer to that. I think that's a question that the young organizers today need to wrestle with. How do we take that opportunity you named, which is not only urban, not only suburban, it's across the country, every state—how do we organize for power, politically and in the economic sphere, out of this food movement? Because we have to, because otherwise it's going to stay at this kind of low and not very powerful way. We won't have the power to affect the policies that mean too much fungicide and pesticides are being used, that too much soil is washing away, that the climate is changing towards disaster.

RK: I think you've moved sort of towards the last thing I wanted to, I just talked about, is this issue of a number of people I've talked to, when we go through and think about the progress and successes that have been made along the way in policies, we still look at a bigger issue of the structure of agriculture. We still have two quite different systems operating there, and in the long run is it possible to have the real sustainable agriculture operating in a larger world of unsustainability? I'd like to have you talk a little bit about that. It brings in some of the ideas around the narrative...

MS: Yeah. I mean, I think the short answer to your question is it's not going to be possible for very long anyway. For one reason is, I'm very concerned about the health of the planet. This is not a parlor question, it's not just like—well, let's explore this. It's happening in our world. We have to address climate change and a multitude of other environmental issues. So, no, it can't persist. And then there's another question, and it's what we call sustainable agriculture, that assortment of approaches to farming and food systems that protect the planet and orient themselves toward health and prosperity for all. If that ever becomes a threat, the big threat to the existing power structure, they won't be allowed to persist either, and then it will be kept at a level that it's safe. That's my analysis, that's what I believe. I think that's what our members

believe, for the most part, in this organization as well. So, therefore, we need strategies that actually are about changing the structure of agriculture, and what we mean by that is a couple things. One is ... I remember when it became most clear to me. I don't know, Ron, when this was, but I remember flying over California, one of the valleys in California, and it was a clear day and I looked down onto the land and what I saw was a factory floor, the way it was just so regimented and laid out in circles and squares and buildings and I was like—oh, my God! That's what it is. And then, who was working on that factory floor—farm workers. You know, where are the owners? They're not there. I don't know where they all are, but they're not in the field. And so, when we talk about structure of agriculture, what we need to say is—who owns the land? Who has access to it? How is the wealth and the goodness that is being generated from good farming, how is it more shared, a shared prosperity, rather than concentrated in fewer hands? So that's one meaning for the word “structure of agriculture.” I also like to think about it in terms of, when I think about structural reform, the two big questions I think about is who decides and who benefits. Structural reform changes who decides, makes decisions about public policies and makes changes about who benefits from them. So a structural reform in the structure of ag is that all the people who want healthier food and cleaner water and spaces for wildlife to flourish, that they actually have more of a say in deciding what kind of agriculture. And it's not held tightly by the ag committee in the Senate and the ag committee in the House and the USDA and, of course, the big agribusiness corporations. So I think we need a full-on engagement of people whose lives are affected by agriculture in the decision-making process about our policies that changes who owns the land and who benefits from the wealth that is generated from agriculture. And I think we need to be serious about that. We need to take it on as a campaign. We don't need to sugar-coat it; we need to be plain-spoken about it. I do think that's what generates people's ... that revs people up. People want justice, they want a say. And that's also another critique a little bit about where we're at in terms of sustainable agriculture. There's a lot of attention to what's realistic. What can we actually do in Washington, the political reality of Washington? You're familiar with the phrase—politics is the art of the possible—and it is. The best politicians know how to work the system the best way to get the most out of what you can from the current system. I think Paul Wellstone was a politician like that. He's out there on the democratic part of the Democratic Party, or whatever he used to say, but he worked through amendments and he worked with, aligned with Chuck Grassley from Iowa. He figured things out. That's all well and good, but organizing ... so that's politics is the art of the possible—organizing is the art of making more possible. It changes the context. It means instead of being able to work this deal, you've moved the reality of the context to such an extent that a better deal is possible, a better policy can be won. So we need to invest in organizing. You're not surprised to hear me say that; I'm a lifelong organizer. But that's really what we need—we need the change from the ground up to be united with the skills of lobbyists and policy analysts in state capitals and in Washington, DC. And I do believe that's possible, but we have to get busy with it. What the members and staff of the Land Stewardship Project most need are organizations who are true to their own values and their own regions or states as we are to ours. And to forge a common front for the good of the planet and for our food and for our farms. So I'd like to see NSAC get bolder. I'd like to see NSAC not just talk about the DC political reality, but the reality in our communities. That it's OK to say, no, I don't think that farmer should be subsidized to own 30,000 acres of land, and for me to drink the polluted water that results. And to be clear that there are some divisions here. Personally, I'll say it, I believe everybody's a child of God. I don't hate anybody, but there is injustice in the world, and we need to be clear about it and then forge

strategies to change it. So this crop insurance campaign that I talked about, I think that's an opportunity. What's politically possible in Washington around that right now, there are some possibilities, but what's going to make more become possible is organizing around structure of ag issues, around land concentration being funded by public dollars through crop insurance. That's going to light the fire. That's the prairie fire approach. And then unite that with skilled lobbyists, policy analysts, and bring it. I mean, that's how we think.

RK: Very good, very good. Well, is there anything else you'd like to add to this, Mark? Anything more? I think that's a good statement to really sum up your strong organizing point of view. Have you got anything else you'd like to add?

MS: I think there are a lot of young people who are farming, and who are coming into farm or food organizing, and they are ... it's a broadly multi-racial group. It's they have skills honed in some of the things we need for communications, around digital communications, etc., graphics. They're more oriented to arts and culture, and I have tremendous hope because of that.

RK: I guess I have hope too in that I see a lot of the concern among younger people is around climate, and one of the things—we don't have to go into a lot of detail about it, but one of the things agriculture can do is a change in agriculture to more sustainable methods is a significant step towards dealing with climate change.

MS: You bet.

RK: Both to mitigate it and to adapt in a way that the land can handle some of these changes that are going to come from climate change.

MS: The younger generations are thinking about that, working on it. They're understanding how concentration of economic power and might exacerbates climate change, because that amassed money is then tried to be invested. Where do the Fortune 500 invest their billions? In things like the tar sands and the pipelines and, you know, so like if we are able to build a more shared prosperity and come up with green approaches to food, farming and industry, yeah, we can take this, we can do this. It's not unsolvable, but we have to take on the whole structure of our economy to do it, that's what I think.

RK: Thank you.

MS: All right.

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