

Ferd Hoefner
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Narrator

Ron Kroese
Interviewer

December 6, 2015

Ferd Hoefner—FH
Ron Kroese—RK

RK: This is Ron Kroese, and today I'm in Des Moines, Iowa. It's December 6, 2015, and I have the privilege of interviewing the policy director of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Ferd Hoefner. Ferd, we've known each other a long time, but a lot of people would be interested in your background, and I'd like to have you tell me a little bit about how you got interested in agriculture, going all the way back to your childhood, and, really, into social justice that has also informed a lot of your work.

FH: I was not really involved in agriculture growing up. I grew up in suburban Long Island, very close to New York City, very close to Kennedy Airport, which was then Idlewild Airport, and close, also, to Farmers Boulevard, which had no farms whatsoever by the time I was growing up, and was very involved in social justice activities as a teen and young adult, primarily civil rights and anti-Vietnam War issues, and that experience, and having had that experience as part of my church life activities was very important, sort of building blocks to what happened later in my life. My really first agriculture experience, if you could call it that, was at college. I went to Oberlin College in Ohio, and did some work on and off on the student farm there, which was run by the Quaker students on campus. That was a great learning experience for me, helping to build a greenhouse, learning how to do composting and growing some crops. I was also very involved there in the student cooperative association, which was primarily housing, but also ran a food co-op and also purchased from local farms, and that was pretty much unheard of at the time in the early-, mid-'70s. So that was very interesting experience, and it's nowhere like where that movement is today, with so many campuses so involved in farm and food issues, but it was certainly a precursor to what we see today. So that was really that experience in college, but I was majoring in government and minoring in history and had a particular interest in the so-called world food crisis of the 1970s, and was really studying that and trying to figure it out. I went to the National University Conference on World Hunger, which was in Austin, Texas, and met a lot of people who I then rubbed shoulders with later in my career at that sort of formative event and wrote some papers and did some independent study on that. So when I came to Washington I actually came because I didn't go to India; I was originally planning to go to India on an agricultural development project through the United Methodist Church. Had that happened, I would have been over there for three-to-four years, and then back in the States working on still the same project, but back home for several other years. So I thought I had four or five or six years of my life sort of planned out as a college graduate. That fell through at the very last minute. I actually had my bags packed and passport in hand, and, for a variety of reasons, it didn't happen. So my fall-back option was to come to Washington, DC on campus back at

Oberlin. I had started the Oberlin Food-Hunger Action Center, and there were a bunch of students who were very engaged in a wide variety of activities, some local, some state government activities. We actually went to Columbus, Ohio and testified on some bills in the Ohio legislature. But one of the things we did through the Oberlin Food-Hunger Action Center was to work on the 1977 Farm Bill. So I was a senior at that time, and was, sort of, as a grassroots advocate seeing what we could do to influence the Ohio congressional delegation on that farm bill. So, because of that interest, and when India fell through, I thought—well, the farm bill is still going on; maybe I can hook into it somehow. So I came to Washington, DC and this is pretty unusual today, but on the very first day on Capitol Hill I just sort of wandered around, where I came into, actually, to the offices of Rich Nolan—who is currently a congressman from Minnesota, but for a long while wasn't, but back then was—and talked to his ag staff person. The more we got to talk he said—you know, we don't really have something for you here, but you should really, because you're from New York, you should go talk to Fred Richmond, who was congressman from Brooklyn and on the House Agriculture Committee. And so I walked down the hallway, got to his office, talked to his ag staff people, and immediately they gave me a desk and a phone and an assignment, and I started working the same day. Doesn't happen that way today very often, but it did back then. And so I became engaged in whatever they needed me to do, relative to finishing up the last few months of that farm bill campaign. He was the chair of the Food Stamp Committee in Congress, so a lot of it had to do with the food stamp program, but more so, urban gardening and urban forestry, and farmers markets. He was the author of bills on all of those subjects, and one of my first assignments was to follow through with the very original farmers market grantees to see how their projects were going and what I could bring back to the congressman in terms of recommendations they had to improve the program. So from my very first few weeks in Washington, working on this stuff, I was already plugged into groups around the country who were the very first grantees of the USDA Farmers Market Program. So that's a little bit about my entry into this.

(6 minutes: 12 seconds)

RK: I know from doing several interviews now with people that have been involved with the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and its predecessors, I've noticed that some very significant things were happening in the late '70s that had a lot of influence on a lot of the people that were involved, and I'd like to have you talk a little bit about that. For example, I think it's 1976 when *The Unsettling of America*, the book by Wendell Berry that had so much influence on so many of us, and then the National Ag Land Study came along, so talk a little bit about the environment, the milieu that was happening at that time.

FH: There was a lot going on in the late '70s. That interest in what we would call today local and regional food was very ripe at the time. Obviously, the world hunger situation was particularly severe, so a lot of people found their way into food and agricultural issues through that venue, and then, obviously, just the crisis for family farm agriculture, and the unsettling of American agriculture and rural communities beginning to be hollowed out, certainly accelerated a decade later, but we saw the beginnings of that. So that was very much a part of what I was thinking about at the time. I think early in my career the biggest single factor along those lines was the Structure of Agriculture Project that Secretary Bob Bergland had at the Department of Agriculture, and I was working for the religious community, so after I left Congressman

Richmond, I took up with the Interreligious Taskforce on US Food Policy, as one of their policy advocates and really worked, originally, more on international agriculture and food aid and grain reserves, and international economic issues and development issues, but the American agriculture movement developed and came to DC in 1978 as this enormous tractorcade that took over the National Mall, and the religious community decided that they really needed to address domestic ag policy, not just international food and ag policy, and so as the youngest person on the staff, everybody sort of looked at me and said—OK, this is what you’re going to do now. So I still did some international work, but increasingly took over the domestic agriculture portfolio. Another interesting part of that story was not having a real background in domestic agricultural policy, I needed to learn it really fast, and, luckily for me, there was a farmer from central Nebraska on sabbatical from his farm and lobbying on behalf of the Friends Committee for National Legislation, and that person is Don Reeves, who much later became the chair of the board at the Center for Rural Affairs. Don really taught me a whole lot about US agriculture and US agricultural policy, and working with Don I got involved with the Structure of Ag Project that Secretary Bergland had going on at the Department of Agriculture, and went to lots of interesting meetings and we participated in the sense of trying to amplify the work that the department was doing and that Secretary Bergland was doing, and getting information out to the religious community that had this heightened awareness, particularly around world hunger, but also around rural America and those kinds of issues. So that whole project was very enlightening and informative to me, and the book that eventually came out of that, *A Time to Choose*, really set some of the key policy issues and, really, the choices that were before society as to whether we were going to continue to have a family farm agriculture, whether we were going to continue to have healthy rural communities, or were the trends going to accelerate away from those things. And so that became sort of bedrock for me in terms of how I view, to this day, the agricultural policy debate. The interesting thing about that report—it came out and was published not that long after the Carter administration ended and the Reagan administration started, and it was pulled from publication at USDA at the outset of the Reagan administration, and we commandeered all the remaining boxes of published but not distributed reports and actually kept them at the Interreligious Taskforce on US Food Policy, and distributed them over the coming years, to the extent that we were able. So we sort of became the repository to this really important policy changing document that, sadly, at the start of that new administration wasn’t to be anymore. The same parallel thing happened to the famous organic report that Garth Youngberg and many others helped put together at the Agricultural Research Service at USDA, and that report came out about the same time as *A Time to Choose*, and also met the same fate when the Reagan administration started. So those were really important, one more from the organic and environmental side, the other one more from the family farm agriculture. Fast-forward ten years to when Sustainable Agriculture Coalition started, I think those two paths sort of joined together very much through your work at the Land Stewardship Project and many others, sort of bringing the environmental and conservation side together with the structure of agriculture and rural community side of the debate.

(13:08)

RK: I’m glad you mentioned the religious community, because I also think a number of things flourished during those Carter years and under Bob Bergland. But the same time, in the Midwest, the Pope had come to visit Des Moines and kind of fired up some bishops who got involved, and

ultimately we had the “Strangers and Guests” statement, that was a really strong statement on stewardship of the land as a Christian responsibility. That was happening at the same time, too.

FH: There was a lot of religious community involvement, and there still is, but it was, I think, particularly heightened at that point in time, the Pope’s visit to Des Moines certainly being a major factor. Almost all the major Protestant denominations and the Catholic bishops were putting out statements like the “Strangers and Guests” statement of the Catholic bishops, but all the Protestant denominations were also coming out with reports, some related to conservation and soil and water, and all of them talking about family farms and rural communities. And so we collected all of those and tried to get the word out. Actually, I got to work on several of them, in the background, ghost writing editor-type of role, and that was really important. We had a working group on domestic agricultural policy for the Interreligious Taskforce on US Food Policy that was very well represented in terms of the various religious denominations and organizations that participated in that. And that goes on to this day. I think participation isn’t maybe quite as widespread as it was then, but it’s still an important element of the policy process in DC. I think, for obvious reasons, those denominations that have strong rural presence are particularly involved in those issues, but with food issues more broadly, and domestic hunger issues, and urban agricultural issues, today you also see that it sort of crossed beyond just the denominations that have that sort of stronger presence in rural America. So it really continues to this day to be an important part of the story. A side note on that and National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition is that we are in the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill; that’s where our offices are located, and we’ve always been there, in part because I was working there ahead of that. So, basically, from 1978 until today, 2015, I have worked out of the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill, and that’s always been where the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition offices have been, because of that sort of religious grounding that I started with.

RK: Though the building itself is rather humble, it’s in a terrific location. It’s right across the street from the Capitol.

FH: The Methodist Building is great. It’s location, location, location, so we’re right there, right across the street from the Capitol, right across the street from the House and Senate office buildings. It makes it very easy to do our work. We’re not that far from the US Department of Agriculture, so it works very well. I’ve had, over the years, many people who have tried to entice me to come, to move into different office space downtown or on K Street or in northern Virginia. I don’t entertain those conversations very long at all, because you can’t beat the location, plus the community of people that are in the building is just great people to be around.

JK: Then, let’s pick up from the Interreligious Taskforce, when you moved on from there. How did that happen, to when you ended up, I think, ultimately with Bread for the World, but talk a little bit about that.

FH: The Interreligious Taskforce on US Food Policy came out of the world hunger crisis in the ‘70s, sort of the religious community response. It was Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, probably 30 religious organizations altogether that made up the organization. We had working groups on domestic agriculture, domestic hunger, international development assistance and food-aid,

international economic policy—so it covered a broad range of issues. During the beginnings of the Reagan administration it went through a name change, in part in response to what was happening in policy and on Capitol Hill. So it became the Interfaith Action for Economic Justice, responding to the very severe budget cuts that were happening to domestic food programs and international agricultural development programs in those early years of the Reagan administration. It carried forward all the issues that the Interreligious Taskforce on US Food Policy had, but was also adding more in the broader economic justice arena. I continued, even after the name change, to be the point person for the domestic agricultural policy piece of it, so that my work pretty much continued the same through the name change. Though I did, towards the end of my time there in 1985 and 1986, pick up tax reform as a big issue. The president and Senator Bradley and Representative Gephardt were jointly working on tax reform at the time, and we picked it up both as an economic justice issue for low-income consumers, but also very much as an agricultural policy issue. So as I was making that transition in my career from Interfaith Action for Economic Justice, I then went into a consulting role after that, sort of did lobbying on a contract basis, including for the religious community on tax reform, a host of issues, including the earned income tax credit, but also, for the Lutheran Church, on tax reform and agriculture, and my work there was very influenced by the Center for Rural Affairs and the work that Chuck Hassebrook was doing on tax reform in agriculture. So that was one of my entre points into what became the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. The other major one was the work with the Land Stewardship Project and representing Land Stewardship Project in DC around some conservation issues, particularly related to insurance companies taking a huge swath of farmland during the farm crisis and tearing out conservation practices and trying to get Congress to pay attention to that issue. So for a period of years I did consulting. I did work for a wide variety of organizations, primarily in food and agriculture, somewhat in tax reform, somewhat on housing issues. But shortly thereafter, the very first organizing meetings happened for what became the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and the Midwest Sustainable Ag Working Group, and I just sort of morphed into that business over time.

(21:04)

RK: So you've been there ever since as this all come together over the years, and we'll go through some of those changes and growth, but I'd like to pick up next with the next farm bill after '77, and the policies that the *A Time to Choose* and the other reports pointed to and how you picked up on those.

FH: The 1977 Farm Bill, in and of itself, was very interesting. Its very first title was the family farm title. Sadly, today we no longer have a family farm title of the farm bill. But it did some important things, including mandating that USDA do an annual state of the family farm report, and that reporting requirement continues right up to this day, so the great researchers at the Economic Research Service at USDA crank out an annual update to that report. It's changed over time as to exactly what they look at, but it's a very valuable thing that came out of that farm bill. As did the notion that there should be payment limitations on commodity subsidies. That was also part of the family farm title, another issue that I've worked on ever since then. It also had probably the most progressive food stamp title that we've ever had in a farm bill, and many other things, including the farmer-owned grain reserve, which was an issue that I was working on at the time. So the '77 Farm Bill was really a pretty progressive bill in many ways, and not in

all ways, but certainly in many ways it was, and so it was interesting that that was how I got my feet wet and saw how that got put together. So the next one after that, in 1981, was a very, very different episode. It was far less of an adventurous farm bill, far more just sort of doing the basics. But one of the big issues was what the target prices would be for the commodity programs and a pretty strong and raging debate over what the government guaranteed minimum price should be, and that took up a huge part of the debate. It was a very difficult farm bill to get much else going on. There was basically no conservation title to speak of. There was the Farmland Protection Policy Act that did get through then, that later led to some actual USDA programs to help preserve farmland, so there were a few things that did get through, but it was pretty difficult landscape politically in 1981 to get a whole lot done in a progressive fashion. So that was a good, important lesson for me in how difficult this work can be and how you need to search for opportunities and make sure when there is an opportunity that you capitalize on it, because there will be times when it's very, very difficult. One of the very interesting things in 1981 that I was able to participate in—there were three or four of us that were lobbying Congress on something at the time we called cross compliance, the idea that there should be conservation requirements in return for the receipt of public subsidies for commodities. I can clearly remember how we were pretty much laughed out of every room that we went into on Capitol Hill. People thought that that was a very strange idea. It had a very short shelf life at the time. We didn't get very far on it, but fast-forward to the next farm bill after that in 1985, and it became the law of the land, and we had a highly erodible land requirement as well as a wetland protection requirement written into the farm bill, and that continues to this day. So sometimes, even during a farm bill where it's difficult to make progress, you can set the stage for the next one or the next one after that and sort of plant the seed that can then have the time to germinate politically so that it becomes feasible over time.

(25:41)

RK: I know the National Ag Land Study, I believe, came out, was released in '81, and I think being 1981 and that farm bill, it really didn't have the impact, despite what it revealed about how devastating the erosion that once again had become in the United States, after a big movement in the '30s coming out of the dust bowl and everything, that things had really slid back. But I think you're right, I think it took until the '85 Farm Bill for a lot of that to really take hold that came along with the increasing farm crisis and things like that. So pick up on what was leading up to the '85 Farm Bill and the Midwest SAWG and all of this that were emerging at that time.

FH: The 1981 National Ag Land Study and the very first iteration of the Resource Conservation Act reports that came out in the early 1980s out of the Department of Agriculture did help set the stage for what became the major conservation title of the 1985 Farm Bill. And even beforehand, prior to the farm bill, what is today the Conservation Reserve Program started in a kind of piloted process because of those reports, and the huge devastating high levels of erosion on certain parts of US agriculture, and Congress did respond in the same way that they responded to the conservation compliance idea, so both the Conservation Reserve Program, which set aside a large amount of commodity acreage and took it out of commodity production, both for the conservation benefit, but, obviously, also for the supply management function that it served to stabilize prices, particularly in wheat, but in other commodities as well. So the 1985 Farm Bill was really pivotal in terms of really putting conservation front and center in the farm bill debate.

The two concrete things that came out of it were conservation compliance and the Conservation Reserve Program, but even beyond those two issues it was this whole notion that conservation deserved a seat at the table, and ever since then it's been a major part of each successive farm bill since then. So that was really, really important. The religious community had a role in that. One of the things that we did, my colleagues and I at Interfaith Action for Economic Justice, was we formed a team of agriculture interest groups, both farm groups, conservation groups, anti-hunger groups, and sort of consumer organizations that had an interest, and we met almost weekly throughout that farm bill process. We put out a document called "Beyond Crisis," trying to get the idea on the table that we didn't have to be in a farm crisis forever, and that policy had a role to get us beyond the farm crisis and onto firmer footing. And so that document became really important. It's one of the rare times, in my Washington experience at least, where that kind of wide public interest coalition has been put together so that you had consumers and the anti-hunger, conservation, environment, farm groups, family farm organizations, all working together on a similar platform for a farm bill. I wish it was possible to do that today. It probably wouldn't be, but it was then. Different people ran with different parts of the agenda, but the fact that it was a common agenda, I think, had an important role to play in the success of that 1985 Farm Bill, so that was an important piece, and really put me in contact with people from conservation and environmental groups who had a big role to play in that farm bill, and those relationships with those organizations have paid off for the National Sustainable Ag Coalition for a long time now.

RK: I think for the record it would good to probably say what is conservation compliance, and a little bit more about that.

FH: Conservation compliance is this notion that there should be a quid pro quo for receipt of taxpayer subsidies for commodity and crop insurance and conservation and farm credit—all the different ways that the farm bill helps support producers, particularly commodity producers, and the idea is, the quid pro quo is that, amongst other things, the taxpayers and the general public should be assured that their subsidies aren't damaging the environment, at least with respect to soil erosion and wetlands. Those have been the centerpieces of conservation compliance. Farmers with highly erodible land have to have a conservation plan that gets soil erosion more under control, and you can't drain wetlands to put into agricultural production and continue to receive federal subsidies. So those are the two issues that conservation compliance to this day still talks about. It is interesting in the early part of the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition we did try to expand that so that it would also be covering water quality issues, amongst others. Sad to say that we have never achieved that goal of expanding, though it's still very much on our agenda.

(31:56)

RK: I also think, coming out of the farm crisis of the '80s, there was also an effort to increase prices for commodities, and I remember the debate about whether the notion of reviving parity for pricing should be brought back, and could it be. That created some tensions within the effort to reform agriculture. I'd like to have you talk about that, because it was a very significant thing in that period of time.

FH: There was a lot of attention to price and whether there was still ways in the '80s to have the government effectively set price for the major commodities, and that had long been one of the strains of US farm policy, going all the way back to the New Deal. So the attempt to set parity prices for the commodities was still very strong. There was the famous Harkin-Gephardt bill that was a parity-based bill that already had been introduced and had been pushed by the Save the Family Farm Coalition in the mid-'80s at the time that the Sustainable Ag Coalition and the Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group got started. Our take was a little bit different. Looking at the farm crisis and how mid-scale family farm agriculture was going to survive, those who weren't foreclosed on or didn't go bankrupt, what was the future? And it seemed like an important part of that future was how to farm in different ways, how to reduce input costs, how to get a greater return to labor and management activities, so that the mid-scale could retain themselves as mid-scale family farms without needing to get big or get out. And so reducing input costs, farming more in concert with the environment, but also trying to get more premium prices or value-added prices at the selling end of farming also became really important. So we were looking at, perhaps, more creative ways, less government intervention ways to keep farms in business. But there was certainly a tension there that continues to some extent to this day, though less dramatic than it was in the '80s. Very early-on in the history of the organization there were meetings between those two strains of the progressive farm movement, trying to work out how we could all live together and fight our various legislative battles without stepping on each others' toes, and that, I think, more or less happened. There was certainly tension, probably hard feelings on all sides to some extent, but I think the National Family Farm Coalition still exists today, and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition still exists today. We do many things in common; we share many of the same policy priorities and objectives, though we also work on things that each other don't work on. So I think it was successful overall, though certainly in the heat of the moment there were many raging debates over which direction to go.

RK: And I can remember, too, that, at least as I understand it, some supply management was always a part of the parity effort, and it became increasingly difficult to make a case for controlling supply with all the push for international so-called feeding the world and all of that was operating in the background, too, correct?

FH: Parity pricing or similar ways of government guaranteeing a minimum price for commodities was very much based on supply management and it became harder the more US agriculture became a global supply chain, and also just the increase in the amount of commodities that were being used on a global basis. It became more and more difficult to be able to defend the amount of supply control that would be necessary to get prices to parity level. So it was a very, very difficult assignment for those who took it up. Our not working on that was not just a practical consideration of how difficult it was, but it was also a concern over how were we going to diversify the landscape and get a more sustainable agricultural system out there, which wasn't just based on the five primary commodities and was more diversified. But supply management was also important in the work of the sustainable agriculture movement as well, so we proposed ... at the time there were still land set-asides as part of the annual commodity program, and we proposed various ways to make those environmentally more responsive and longer-term, so farmers could do more creative things rather than just set aside their most marginal land and then go farm the heck out of all the rest of their land. We were trying to figure out ways to use the existing commodity program mechanisms but make it a more balanced, more

supportive of sustainable systems. We never really succeeded in that. Maybe in little ways we did, but not in any major way before, by the mid-1990s, the supply management functions pretty much disappeared altogether, with the major exception of the Conservation Reserve Program, which is still doing, to this day, 25 million acres of supply management. But the annual set-asides and land diversions and acreage reduction programs have all disappeared now, so we have very little, at least in the grains and the commodities, very little supply management left.

RK: And that's really led to an effort to have more and more that the working lands, that lands are in production also have a strong conservation component or sustainability component. We can get to that a little later in our discussion. I'd like to have you talk a little more, then, about summing up the '85 Farm Bill. What are the highlights? What was achieved, and maybe what didn't get done that had to move forward to the 1990 bill?

FH: The 1985 Farm Bill, definitely the biggest take-away was this strong conservation title, put conservation on the map. There were some modest tweaks to how we did payment limitations for commodities. So it wasn't the only thing in that farm bill to celebrate, but it was certainly a strong thing. But important for sustainable agriculture, two other things happened in that bill that didn't get a whole lot of attention at the time in the public media, but were really important to the movement. One was the original authorization for what today is the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, or the SARE Program. At USDA it was then called the Agricultural Productivity Act, but it made it into that 1985 Farm Bill, so that's really the original authorization for the program. And then also the ATTRA (Appropriate Technology Transition for Rural Areas) program, or the National Sustainable Ag Information Service, that's run by the National Center for Appropriate Technology, also was originally authorized in that 1985 Farm Bill. I'll also note that it had some solar energy provisions and actually used the words "sustainable agriculture," not in any programmatic sense, but actually used the term. So those are some of the ways that the 1985 Farm Bill was a precursor to some of what we did in 1990, but we certainly added a lot more policy tools in 1990.

RK: Was there any progress towards the organic side of things in the 1985 Farm Bill, or what was happening on that front at that time, do you recall?

FH: There was a lot of debate, at least some debate, around organic agriculture in 1985, but that really took until 1990 to reach fruition in terms of the farm bill.

(41:14)

RK: So these things that were passed, one of the things that I want to talk about is how did you then get these things funded and implemented—I know that's a lot of the struggle; it's not like you get a farm bill done and you can twiddle your thumbs for a few years and then get back to work.

FH: Implementing a farm bill is at least as important as what gets passed by Congress, and in many respects is more important, and the 1985 Farm Bill was a great lesson to be learned in that regard, particularly with respect to the highly erodible land part of conservation compliance. So we came out of the 1985 Farm Bill cheering that a sustainable use or non-degradation level of

soil erosion was going to be mandated and that the department would be helping farmers develop conservation plans that would do that, so that we weren't losing soil and topsoil at an unsustainable rate. Very, very quickly in the implementation process the wheels began to fall off the bus, and to make what was a very long story somewhat shorter, by the time all was said and done, USDA was approving plans that were three, four, and even five times greater than the sustainable level of soil erosion, prodded by some members of Congress who were hearing from farmers who didn't want to have to write conservation plans that kept soil erosion within tolerable levels. It got so bad, in fact, that by the 1990 Farm Bill, those weaker standards became legislative standards as well, and we've never been able to turn back to what we had in 1985. That continues, I think, to be part of the long-term agenda. We should be back to the scientifically sound level of soil erosion standard, but it's just been very difficult to achieve. So implementation of a farm bill—that was a great lesson to be learned. You do not stop with the legislation: There's budgeting, there's appropriations, there's rule making, and there's, even beyond just the rule making process, there's program handbooks and guidelines and guide books, and then the actual way it gets implemented on the ground. And you've got to be there the whole time, or what you achieve legislatively can very quickly go up in smoke.

RK: Has the Midwestern Sustainable Ag Working Group and the NSAC been important to their members to help with that whole effort towards implementing, as well as getting the word out about the need for the policy changes, to actually see that they are implemented?

FH: One of the things I'm proudest about about the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition's way that we work on policy is that we do legislation when legislative things need to be achieved, but we look for other ways of doing policy change, based on existing authorizations and existing authority, that the Department of Agriculture or the Environmental Protection Agency or Food and Drug Administration—whoever we're working with at the time—so we're not always looking for the legislative fix, we're looking for how to move policy forward in whatever way it happens. But then when we do legislative campaigns, we never rest on our laurels, we try to engage citizens and farmers in the rule making process and in the implementation process. We put mechanisms in place to make sure we're getting feedback from farmers or whoever a particular program is for—that might be farmers market managers, or it might be agricultural researchers, but we're always getting that feedback loop, so we're finding out how is this working on the ground. That, in turn, has us bring recommendations back to whatever agency is implementing the program, and it's a continuous loop of making sure that we get the most out of each opportunity that we create, and that's really, really important, and I see lots of organizations, sadly, that don't do that kind of comprehensive work. And also funders or other donors who look at the legislative change as sort of The Campaign, and then lose interest and move on to some other issue. You do that at your own peril, because you have to be engaged, oftentimes in the agricultural appropriations process, which happens every year. So every year there's an agricultural funding bill, and while they really should only be dealing with funding levels, they often deal with policy as well through some backdoor mechanisms that the appropriators have worked out over the years. So you also have to be aware each and every year anything that you might achieve in a farm bill or some other piece of authorizing legislation can be undone fairly quickly, so you have to remain on your toes. And I think NSAC has really done that pretty well over the years.

(46:43)

RK: Before we leave the early-to-mid '80s, I'd like to have you talk about who are some of the, in your mind, heroes or people that really deserve credit, both as legislators or even legislative staff that you've relied on. We know that so much of getting this work done is building personal relationships, so I'd like to recognize some of those people you've worked with, coming out of the '70s through the mid-'80s.

FH: Legislative champions are important. All the relationships—I mean, advocacy is very much a relationship business, so my biggest heroes are the farmers and other practitioners on the ground who are living it, and particularly those people who are policy interested and policy savvy and are able to turn their—here's what's happening on my farm—into—here's what we could really use in terms of policy responses. That is so much of what NSAC has done and continues to do to this day that's so important. And then the organizations that make up the coalition and the staff people who are just so giving of their time and their expertise and so willing to roll up their sleeves and really—we have all these different regions of the country trying to work out policy together, and their agricultures are different, and trying to reach a common denominator. So all of those are heroes to me. But legislative champions are really, really important. You can't achieve things without policy makers who are going to be in your camp, so cultivating those champions is very, very important. We always say that once we have a champion or a would-be champion, we are at their beck and call, so if they need help with a press release or legislative development, or remarks for the floor of the House or Senate, or whatever it is—we're ready to do that as if we were their staff, and we've done a lot of that over the years. There are so many different champions to call attention to, but for that 1990 Farm Bill experience, we had our marker bills or our bills that we got introduced to be able to get our ideas on the table and to get people interested and excited about them. We had a bill in the United States Senate that was introduced by Senator Wyche Fowler from Georgia, and a parallel bill—it wasn't exactly identical, but it shared many of the same provisions introduced by Representative Jim Jontz from Indiana. So we used those bills to get ideas out there in the public domain, whether it was the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program or the Wetlands Reserve Program or the Integrated Farm Management Program. Many of the things we ultimately won in the 1990 Farm Bill were in those bills. Having those champions working on those things, it was also incredibly important for that farm bill that Senator Pat Leahy from Vermont was the chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee. Without him and his staff being there to guide the debate and do the negotiating, we wouldn't have come out with all of the things that we did, so that was also hugely important. It was a very long and complex farm bill. It had more titles than any farm bill before or since. It was a major magnum opus, and it was all done in a year, which was the tradition in the '70s and '80s and through the 1990 Farm Bill that Congress had a year to do the farm bill, and it happened in that year. Ever since then it's taken two and three years to complete a farm bill, but back then that was about the length of time. We also looked for individual members of Congress to do very particular amendments, so Congresswoman Jill Long from Indiana did a series of amendments for us around loans that USDA had made for conservation purposes, and trying to bring those, modernize them, getting them really in synch with what the conservation needs were of the time, and removing things that were really negative contributors to conservation, but had always gone on as part of conservation loans. She also helped us get women farmers recognized as legitimate borrowers within farm

lending from the Department of Agriculture. So we did some work with her, we did some work with Representative Tim Penny from Minnesota on beginning farmers in that 1990 Farm Bill, but then even more so two years later in the Agricultural Credit Act of 1992. So many, many different champions on different issues, but we've used the same model pretty much over and over again. We've used marker bills whenever it seems appropriate, where a year or two in advance of a major piece of legislation, get a champion, get them a bill that has lots of ideas in it. You know going into them you're not going to get a hundred percent of those provisions ever enacted into law, but we've been fairly successful in getting 50, 60, 70 percent of those marker bills included in legislation. So we've used that model, we've been very good about trying to get particular offices who may not be willing to be our champion across the whole gamut of issues we're interested in, but are very, very strong in one particular area, and try to find them some amendments they can get behind. We've also been fairly successful over the years in getting bipartisan champions for what we introduce. So our sort of default setting is to always have a Democrat and a Republican on each bill or amendment we introduce. We don't always succeed in that for a variety of reasons, sometimes it's one party, sometimes it's the other on a particular amendment or bill, but that's sort of our default setting is to always try to have it be as bipartisan as possible. So I think all of those things have gone into sort of how we succeed at policy and how we cultivate those champions, so sometimes you can find a champion who is an across-the-board champion—Senator Tom Harkin from Iowa was a great example of that. There were relatively few ideas we ever took to Senator Harkin and his staff that they said no, we can't do. Then other members of Congress—we know there's just one or two things that we're likely to agree on, but we can agree to agree on those things and forge ahead. So that all goes into the mix of making good policy.

(54:21)

RK: We talked quite a bit, now, about the things leading up to the '85 Farm Bill, and even a little on the '90 Farm Bill, but I'd also like to have you talk about what was going on internally for the movement as it grew, particularly for what became NSAC, through the Midwest Sustainable Ag Working Group and the other things that were going on around the country. And also even about yourself, as far as who you were working with most closely.

FH: Well, the Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group and the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition really got started at the very beginning of 1988, end of 1987, beginning of 1988. From a personal standpoint, I had been working the year or two before with Land Stewardship Project, with the Center for Rural Affairs, and with a variety of other organizations, not that they became MSAWG organizations, but were in the same fields. And so I recall going out there to Minnesota for that early 1988 meeting, and several people came from Washington, DC, actually to the first several meetings—I think the next one after that was in Madison, Wisconsin. Several of us came from Washington. It wasn't totally clear, I don't think, to any of us that a) that this was going to be a viable organization, or even that it was going to be an organization at all, for that matter. But those meetings were incredibly exciting—people primarily from the Midwest, though some from other parts of the country coming together. There was so much that people wanted to do, and it was a really can-do attitude that got me excited about it. So, several of us who came from DC would chit-chat on the way back or back in town. It became clear pretty quickly that it was something I really wanted to do, and, I think, in a very consensus-based way. I sort of got tapped

to do that, and I've certainly never lived to regret it whatsoever. It's been a great ride. So the organization, I think another magical thing about it from the get-go was that the working group—it wasn't even called Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, it was just Sustainable Agriculture Working Group without the Midwest in front of it. But at that very first meeting, Chuck Hassebrook stood up, from the Center for Rural Affairs, and said—we need representation in Washington. That has to be a more formal coalition, but we need to have everybody that wants to be involved in this involved in this, so we need sort of a two-tier system, a coalition and a working group. We've called them different things over the years. The terminology has changed, but the principles have remained the same, that there would be a big tent of people who wanted to participate, have voice, be part of the policy development process, and a somewhat smaller set of organizations that would be officially and formally represented in Washington, DC by the Sustainable Ag Coalition, or today the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. So I think that two-tier process has been incredibly important and to fast-forward all the way to 2015, we have 112 member groups altogether, of which 41 are the formal coalition. And those ratios have stayed pretty similar over time. So I think in its earliest iteration, back in 1988, it was, to the best of my recollection anyway, it was about 35 organizations altogether, but 13 in the formal coalition, at least in that initial version of it. So I think that has worked really well. It has given people that want it and desire it a formal representation in Washington and in the policy making arena, but has given even more groups a seat at the table, so that's something organizationally that I think worked really, really well. In terms of all the lead-in activities to what became the 1990 Farm Bill campaign, there are several things that stand out to me. One was the very first actual policy making thing we did as a coalition was to help win the initial funding for what became the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, though then was called LISA—Low Input Sustainable Agriculture. So getting that initial funding through Congress, through the appropriations bill, was really our first legislative thing, and that was two years prior to the farm bill. And then also engaging in developing that program, and the way we helped develop it with farmers having a seat at the table, with NGOs having a seat at the table, with a decentralized administration through four regional centers that were broadly representative, with a nice balance between applied research, education, and extension. So many things that we take for granted in the SARE program today were all part of a struggle that took place and was really the first concrete activity that the SAWG and SAC did in '88 and '89. That was both at the DC level in work I was doing, but also, maybe even more importantly, at the regional level. So, making sure that we had farmers and NGOs on the administrative council, making sure that we had different farmers and NGOs represented on the technical committees that actually were reviewing the proposals—all of that continues to this day and was incredibly important, and was kind of bedrock stuff. Because here, after all, was the first program at USDA, ever, that used the word “sustainable.” So it's been a keystone program for us all these many years, in part because of the really important research and education outreach work it is doing, and how it has helped build the movement, but, politically, it's also important to us, because it is the program at USDA that got the word “sustainable” attached to it, and it was the first thing that we really worked on. So I think in part because of the successes we were having on the LISA, now SARE, program, people started saying—well, OK, so if we can do that, what else can we do? And, obviously, the farm bill was coming up, and people had lots of ideas and really pretty quickly that very first marker bill we introduced, Senator Fowler's bill, was late in 1988, and here we had only formed as an organization early in 1988, so that's pretty rapid-fire. Then we had a different version of the Fowler bill plus the Jontz bill in 1989, and then again in 1990, so

we quickly moved on center stage in terms of farm bill policy and politics. Behind all that was a lot of meetings, a lot of farmer listening sessions that member organizations did with their own farmer constituencies, and then some state-based meetings. And then one very, very cold meeting in Boone, Iowa ... remember how cold it was, being from the East Coast, it was a little bit colder than what I was used to. In fact, the story that some people still tell on me to this day was—and this was obviously long before cell phones—so there was one pay phone at this conference retreat center that we were at, and it was outdoors, and I took my gloves off to push the buttons and my finger got stuck, and it was very painful to get it unstuck off that pay phone. [Chuckles] But I was calling DC for some reason. We needed some bit of information, and I regretted ever making that telephone call. At that meeting I forget how many farmers, but I am thinking maybe 50 or 60 farmers came, not for the meeting itself, but afterwards for a farm bill farmer input session. So that happened at the MSAWG, SAC meeting at that time in Boone, but similar things were happening in states and localities around the Midwest, and to some extent around the country. So all of that helped feed the ideas into the marker bill and into the priorities that we took on in the 1990 Farm Bill, so it was definitely grassroots, farmer-based, but then put through the screen of what can we get members of Congress to introduce, what can we find allies for within the farm ... what was National Farmers Union interested in? What was National Farmers Organization interested in? What was national grain interested in? National Audubon Society? Sierra Club? and on down the line. So trying to find some sweet spots. We didn't always agree, but we often did, and trying to keep it real, so it was really reflecting what sustainable farmers that were part of member organizations were saying. So I think that's another example of what we did originally, we continue to do to this day—in somewhat different ways—obviously a lot more gets done electronically than certainly was possible to even imagine back then. And there are different organizing techniques being used and way more policy fields that we're involved in, but the basic approach to how we did things has remained very steady, and that farmer-based, that ground-truthing in what's actually happening on farms and in communities, I think remains to this day sort of a bedrock of how we operate.

(1:05:20)

RK: That was also when farmer fly-ins happened, was it not? Talk a little bit about that—I know they've been important to NSAC.

FH: Farmer fly-ins have been important since the very beginning, and the second-biggest farmer fly-in we ever did was actually the very first one we ever did, which is mind-boggling to think back on it. [Chuckles] Maybe we didn't know how difficult they are, logistically to pull off. The Land Stewardship Project played a huge role in being able to provide the organizers and the logistical people, because back then the Washington, DC office was me, myself, and I, and if I was going to be doing the policy work and organizing all the logistics of the fly-in, it would have never happened, so that support was really, really critical to make it happen, but that initial fly-in was really important. We got the word out about our marker bills and our issues, got the word out not only to members of Congress, but to some of the ag press in DC, so they started paying attention to us. We were definitely the new kids on the block. People didn't know exactly what to make of us, and in the ag lobbying circles that was also true. Some people knew me from my previous work. Some people didn't. I'd find myself in meetings with commodity and farm organizations debating x, y, or z in a members of Congress' office. One of the stories I like to tell

is that at one point there was this confusion as to who exactly I represented, and the legislative aide in the room just basically said—oh, Ferd represents hundreds of groups around the country, which is almost true today, but was definitely not true then, but it helped calm the room down about whatever it was we were debating at the time. So that farmer fly-in thing was just really, really important. We continue it to this day. Over time we've emphasized smaller ones that are very focused on a particular bill or a particular issue. And now we do them several times a year instead of one gigantic one. We do them several times, really focused on different things. I think one of the important things, one of the things that people at USDA would tell me about it—because we don't only just visit members of Congress; we also visit agencies at the Department of Agriculture, at the Whitehouse, at the Office of Management and Budget, so we really make the rounds and really put farmers through a lot of work when they come. They might only be coming for a day-and-a-half or two-and-a-half days, but they see a lot of people and do a lot of hard work. But one of the things that people at the department remind me from time to time is they're seeing farmers and ranchers from other organizations routinely, whether it's the Farm Bureau or the Cotton Council or the Soybean Association or the National Cattlemen's Beef Association or Future Farmers of America, for that matter. They are making the rounds continuously, and it's really, really important for sustainable agriculture and sustainable and organic farmers to also be seen and also be heard from in that kind of more direct way. It's not to say that coming to DC is the be-all and the end-all. Actually, equally important, maybe even more important is having farmers and citizen activists show up at the town hall meetings that members of Congress do at home or actually setting up meetings with individual members of Congress while they're home on recess. And that's a technique that we've also used pretty effectively from time to time, and where possible we have member groups set up regular meetings with important policy makers when they're home, so that there's a clear agenda, so it's some clear asks that they can be held accountable for. That's really, really important. It's something I wish we could have more groups doing, but sometimes there's just difficulty in getting it all set up. But we try to prod groups into doing that as much as possible, so it's both things—getting farmers to come to DC, make sure they're heard and seen and respected in the halls of Congress and in the halls at the Department of Agriculture and the other federal agencies, but also that they're showing up at home, or that member groups are inviting the member of Congress to farm events, so they're on-farm and really see it up-close and personal. And that's something that several member groups have really done very, very well over the time. So I think all of that—farmers are the best spokespeople for many of the issues that we're working on, and making sure that we have all the venues in place where they can play that role is just really, really important stuff.

RK: You referred to the environmental groups—talk a little bit about the role during that period, from the '80s to early '90s in the relationship of NSAC or to SAC with the environmental groups and the roles they played and where there were tensions there, too, I remember. Talk about that.

FH: Environmental groups play a really important role in agricultural policy in terms of farm bill policy per se, a much bigger, outsized role from 1985 through the end of the 1990s than is actually true today. And that's another whole story, but they were really important roles. So, Sierra Club, in particular, starting in 1985 and to some degree in 1990 played a hugely important role. The Center for Resource Economics, which today is known as the Environmental Working Group, played a really important role. American Farmland Trust has long been a partner

organization for us, particularly emphasizing the farmland protection part of the puzzle, but other issues as well. National Audubon Society back then played a really important role around farm issues and pesticide issues. And others as well—Natural Resources Defense Council in the ‘90s played an increasingly important role in agricultural policy and farm bill politics. The Isaac Walton League of America, which has always been an NSAC member group, playing a particularly important role, particularly in the Midwest and the Mid-Atlantic states. I could go on—but that’s all really important. A lot of times it worked really well and we were on the same page, and sometimes it worked less well and there were some rip-roaring debates over priorities and over approaches to how to go about it. Those broke down in different ways at different times. Part of it was here we were representing farmers, and that came first and foremost, and perhaps pesticide regulation or mandatory testing of well water were not things that we could jump behind and make major priorities. We had somewhat different priorities, but we always tried to work it out, and I think more or less did so successfully. The Conservation Coalition, which is an informal coalition of conservation groups, both environmental groups and wildlife groups and sustainable agriculture groups in Washington, DC, has been meeting regularly and continuously since 1986. So for an informal group that doesn’t have staff, and you don’t even officially become a member, you just start showing up—for something to have lasted from 1986 and still going on today is quite a feat, and that’s where a lot of the talking through what goes into a conservation title of a farm bill or what the priorities are for an annual agricultural funding bill or how does some new piece of policy coming down the pike from EPA or FDA, what are the ramifications for farm conservation—that’s where all of that gets hashed out and talked through. The coalition itself never takes a position as the Conservation Coalition, so nobody ever goes to Congress and says—the Conservation Coalition believes x. It’s more that it becomes the network through which we can ally. Often almost everybody that participates is on a particular letter or a particular press release or whatever, and sometimes only a handful are, but it gives us a place where we can talk it through and figure out who’s willing to do what. Over time it’s been interesting that the big environmental organizations, whether that’s Natural Resources Defense Council or Sierra Club or Environmental Defense Fund and others, have gotten out of ag policy and farm bill policy over time and aren’t very engaged today. And, likewise, the wildlife organizations have gotten more and more involved over time, so the Conservation Coalition today, Sustainable Ag Coalition, has always been part of it, but the people who show up are more on the wildlife side of things, unless on the other environmental issue side of things than was the case in the ‘80s and the ‘90s. That’s something that I would personally like to see change so that everybody was there, and that might be something we pursue in the coming years.

(1:15:43)

RK: I would like to talk now, too, about who are the funders, how this grew, especially, say, through the mid-‘80s into the ‘90s. Where was the money coming from? Even though I knew it was always tight and the budgets were small, who were the funders?

FH: The sustainable funding community was obviously really important. We couldn’t exist without them, and, from the early days when we had a couple hundred thousand dollar budget, to today, when it’s an almost \$2 million budget. One thing has been a constant, which is the majority of funding is foundation, is grant funding. We do, occasionally, have government funding. We do increasingly have individual donor funding, and I’ve always had membership

dues. But we always try to keep that at a very reasonable level so that we're not excluding anybody by having dues that are beyond the capacity of lower capacity groups to afford. So dues has always been important. It sort of gives us our initial nest egg, but it's not a very big percentage of the overall budget. Donors are increasingly important, but the foundation world has been front and center since day one. What's today the Sustainable Agriculture & Food Systems Funders organization, has been called different things in its earlier iterations, has also been important, so that the funding community interested in sustainable agriculture and food systems is organized and we're organized, and we can have that dialog back and forth. Some of the early funders—obviously you need those initial funders to get things off the ground, so I think of the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation, which funded us for over 20 years. They don't currently fund us, but that was sort of a ... those kinds of initial funders really helped us get off the ground. The Joyce Foundation is another great example of somebody who really helped us do our farm bill work by really putting significant money into the work that we were doing on conservation in particular. Again, an example of a foundation that doesn't fund us today but that was really, really critical in those early years. And I could go on—I don't necessarily want to do a laundry list of everybody that was involved, but it has been a constant, and, luckily for us, there's always been somebody or some group of foundations that are interested enough in the federal policy part of the movement that we've been able to keep it going. There have been crisis moments where that wasn't always ... looked like it would be a given, and we really had to scramble, but pretty much we've been able to keep our heads above water and grow from an organization that was me, myself, and I at the Washington, DC level for years. And then for years we were a two-to-three person office, to today where we're a dozen-person office, and just have so much more. Everything I was doing in those early farm bill fights—I was working on all of the titles of the farm bill that the member organizations said they were interesting in doing and sort of scrambling to keep up with it. Now, today, as policy director, I have six lobbyists under me who each of them have their own particular sub-set, whether it's conservation or research or farm programs or food safety or local and regional food systems, so I can deploy so many more people now. That, also, opens the door then to having additional funder interest because, obviously, you're able to do more, so it sort of feeds off itself. I'm just so thankful over the time that so many of the funders have stayed tried and true and have stuck with us over the years. Obviously, we just couldn't exist without that, so their support is critical, and the sustainable agriculture and food system funders, their staff has been really important to us, keeping us in touch with what's going on within the funding community and where the priorities seen to be resting and also just using us to help teach new foundation staff how the policy stuff works, the importance of it, how they can fund it. There's just so many questions around that, and as the natural turn-over takes place and new grant managers come in place, you sort of have to keep teaching that. It's much like what happens in Congress. The average age of congressional staffers never gets much above 30, and that means there's just constant turn-over and you're constantly needing to do that. The same is true on the funding side—you just really need to be educating and learning together as you move forward with different foundations and different program officers. But overall that's our lifeblood, and so we do it and enjoy it.

(1:21:11)

RK: The 1990 Farm Bill, as you pointed out—it was such an important bill. I would like to have you talk, maybe picking out what you consider the three or four, what were the real victories

there, at least start towards moving things forward for subsequent bills. Let's go in a little more depth there.

FH: The 1990 Farm Bill was quite an undertaking, and we achieved a lot, so I couldn't even begin to fit in all the little things, but just concentrating on some of the biggest things, let me pick up with the sustainable ag research and Education Program, because there we had already been working at the programmatic level, at the USDA level, at the land grant level, and so we went into what became the 1990 Farm Bill thinking—we need to get this down so that progress that we're making is sort of enshrined in law for the long term. So we put a lot of work into that, including changing the name from LISA, Low Input Sustainable Agriculture, to SARE, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education. The chemical industry had put lots of money behind a very coordinated attack campaign against LISA and used the fact that it was a female name to make it a kind of laughing stock within the agriculture community, which was very sad, and I'm glad to say that that probably wouldn't happen today in quite the same super-masculine way that it happened then. Somewhat in reaction to that, but also for a variety of reasons, wanting to leave the low input part of LISA out of the name, we coalesced around SARE as the name. But, more importantly than the name, was really putting it into law in a concrete way with some of the key principles, like it was going to be farmer-based, and that there was going to be a wide stakeholder team that helped run the program. That was revolutionary. It was revolutionary then; it's revolutionary today. There are virtually no other programs within research, education, extension at USDA today that run like the SARE program, where you have this broad stakeholder community, including farms, making the decisions about the program priorities and what goes into the requests for proposals and who gets funded. I wish that it had become the norm for competitive grants programs at the department, much more so than, sadly, has been the case. But, importantly, because we did codify all that, it is still the case for the Sustainable Ag Research and Education Program, and short of somebody convincing Congress to change it, nobody can undo that. So that, I think, was really important. Part of that effort was actually defining sustainable agriculture, since we were going to be using the term, and so another big fight in the 1990 Farm Bill was actually codifying a definition of sustainable agriculture. There are many levels on which that was an interesting process. I remember a document that I kept and kept updating with everybody's favorite definition of the term, and it got to be seven or eight pages long in small font size. I would continually draw on that, but realizing that these long-winded, more academic definitions were never going to make their way into statute, so sort of had to simplify it to some extent, make it more of a bulleted list of key ideas. Importantly, that still is the federal definition of sustainable agriculture, and beyond how it gets used in policy, it also gets used more broadly than that, so you often see the 1990 Farm Bill definition of sustainable agriculture referenced in academic journals, in research papers, referenced by other research programs where they are trying to fund sustainable agriculture and needing to define it, so it has stood this test of time. What went into making that definition is, in some respects, interesting. The short version of that story was there was a nearly 20-minute debate in the House Agriculture Committee over whether the word "chemical" or "biology" or "biological" could be used in the definition. We had "biological" in the definition in our marker bill. And that was a real knock-down, drag-out fight. We finally were able to keep "biological" in the title and we didn't have to add "chemical," but there were definitely members of congress who thought that biology didn't deserve to be in a definition of agriculture, as hard as that is to believe. And so there were many, many negotiations over that definition, but I think it has stood the test of time,

and it always included economics and profitability. It always included rural communities and quality of life, both for the farm family and for the community. It always included the environmental factors, all of them—soil, water, wildlife—the whole gamut. And it always included this idea of using the biological on-farm resources to the maximum extent possible and limiting outside input. So all of that is still part of that, and I think it was just a really, really key win for the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition to win a definition of the term and a program that went with it in that first bill. But that was only one of multiple, multiple campaigns we ran for the 1990 Farm Bill. Another really big important one, if you go back and read our farm bill platform from the late '80s, a big issue was the penalties that sustainable farmers were facing from the commodity program as a result of having a more diverse crop rotation. That was hurting them, it was reducing their amount of government payments, and obviously not only hurting them, but serving as a huge barrier to other farmers changing from more conventional monoculture-type operations into something more diversified and better for the landscape. So that became a huge issue for us. We proposed many things. What we finally actually won was something called the Integrated Farm Management Program. It was within the commodity title of the farm bill, in terms of how it functioned, but it lived in the conservation title of the farm bill, but it directed the Agricultural Conservation Stabilization Service, what today is Farm Service Agency, to run the commodity program in a way that people could do diversified, longer rotations, including pasture, including cover crops, and including minor crops without being locked into monoculture in order to get their government commodity support. So that was huge. It was probably huger conceptually than it ever became programmatically. It was really, really important for the several thousand farmers who made use of it on the one hand. On the other hand, it never really served as an—oh, great, now that barrier's knocked down and other farmers are going to, therefore, move in this way. While the barrier was removed, there wasn't an incentive to do it, so that came later in our organizational policymaking arena, where we started trying to add the incentives. But that original getting the barriers removed, I think was important, became an important theme, to this day, to try to remove existing barriers that prevent people from farming in concert with the environment. So that was important in that respect. It was also really important in that we were going right into the agency that ran the commodity programs for the department, trying to deal with their personnel, trying to deal with their systems. That also paid dividends later in different policy arenas that we went right for it. Ultimately, we decided to take that policy idea and move it to what became the Natural Resource Conservation Service for a variety of reasons later on, but setting up that with the primary farmer agency was really, really important, I think. So that was another great win. A third one which we didn't necessarily set out to do originally—we were very concerned about conservation compliance, the wetland rules around that. There was a lot of controversy, particularly in the Upper Midwest, particularly in Minnesota and the Dakotas around wetland drainage issues and wetland restoration issues, and we set out to do a farm tour and a series of dialogs around Swampbuster, which was what the wetland part of conservation compliance was called. And we actually did that and we came up with some proposals that I think brought farmers and environmentalists together around the same table. So we succeeded in that, but an offshoot from that was farmers saying—the government has paid us for years to drain wetlands, and now you're telling us we shouldn't do that anymore, but why doesn't somebody pay us to restore them if they're so important. And we thought, well gee, that's a good idea. We have this Conservation Reserve Program that takes land out of production and puts it into grass, but what about wetlands? Out of that Swampbuster farmer/environmental dialog came this idea of what eventually became the Wetlands Reserve

Program. So I went back to DC, started putting it together, got some help from some key people that were interested in the subject. We put it into our marker bills. From the time we put it into the marker bill until it became part of the 1990 Farm Bill as signed by the president, it changed relatively little, so we did a good job of framing it up and saying that farmers could be paid for long-term easements or permanent easements and restore wetlands and put more habitat and more wet acres back within farming. We did it in part as a conservation issue. We did it in part as a farm economics issue. Those tend to be lower-performing acres from an economic standpoint, and being able to do a permanent easement for many farmers coming out of that farm crisis, 1980s context was really important to making the farm work economically. The Farm Bureau at the time was dead-set against the Wetland Reserve Program, so a lot of my lobbying activity was going head-to-head with the Farm Bureau. They opposed it on many levels, but the big thing they opposed was easements. They thought easements and permanent easements had no place in the program, and ultimately we compromised so that there was a permanent easement option, a long-term easement option, and a short-term non-easement option, and they predicted that farmers overwhelmingly would take their option, which was the short-term non-easement option, and overwhelmingly, to this day, farmers have chosen the permanent easement option, almost to the extent that the other parts of the program, while they still existed for a long time, just became non-entities, so I'm glad that we were right and the Farm Bureau was wrong about that. It restored over three million acres of wetlands now, fast-forwarding to 2015. So it's been an enormous success, one of the, I think, most successful programs that USDA has ever done from the conservation of the title of the farm bill, and it all emerged from an Upper Midwest farmer/environmental heated debate/dialog/consensus building process around Swampbuster that then created this idea of the Wetland Reserve Program. It's also a great example of where NSAC played a huge role in getting it done and getting it into the farm bill. Other groups also played a big role—National Audubon played a big role. Others—Senator Leahy and his staff played a huge role in actually getting it done and getting it into the conference report for that farm bill. So many, many people involved in it. But it's a great example of where we followed up, we got involved in the rule making, we got involved in making sure that the appropriators didn't do anything to it—and there were some shots to that, to try to defund it through the appropriations process. And there Senator Cochran from Mississippi played a huge role to save the program and defend the program, as did Dale Bumpers from Arkansas. So we had our champions at the appropriations level to make sure the program didn't disappear during the annual funding bill. So we were heavily engaged, right up into what became the '96 Farm Bill, making sure that the program was going to be on solid ground and increase in size. So we did; after that, we stepped back. There were so many organizations at that point heavily, heavily invested in the WRP, Ducks Unlimited being just one of many who were ... they had lobbyists working on this all the time. So we moved on to other things, because we felt we should continue to be involved, but we don't need to be the person defending the WRP at that point. So we moved on to other issues. We still count WRP as an enormous success story, and we still stay involved, but we don't have to play that kind of center role. But back in the 1990 Farm Bill we played a very pivotal role to make it happen.

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RK: At the same time I'd also like to talk about what was going on with organic agriculture with the '90 Farm Bill, and what role NSAC played in that, and some of the issues around that that were also really coming to a head at that time.

FH: Organic agriculture has always been part of the discussion within NSAC, going back to the very first meetings, and I always like to joke that the farmer constituency of NSAC was maybe 10-20 percent organic when we started, and now is probably over 50 percent organic today, but many of them are the same farms and the same farmers doing the same things, sort of, at some point, taking advantage of the marketing and opportunity more so than changing how they were going about farming. But in those early days we made a pretty conscious decision, going into the 1990 Farm Bill, that we would not work on organic certification, and obviously that was one of the huge accomplishments of the 1990 Farm Bill, very much to Senator Leahy's credit for getting that done, and Representative DeFazio on the House side, and others. We were certainly very aware that that was going on. We had a very minor role in the policy making on it. We just decided that we had other issues and that was not front and center for us. Perhaps our most important role in that was I shared office space with one of the lobbyists who was working on the National Organic Program in the 1990 Farm Bill and sort of gave him a desk and a phone and a place to hang his hat to do that work. So we did, in those kind of more minor ways, play a role, but it was not at the center of what we were doing. Then post-1990 Farm Bill, it then took a long, long time before the National Organic Program actually happened at USDA, and that's a whole other story, but once it did become the National Organic Program at USDA, we again made the conscious decision that there were so many organizations and so many lobbyists in Washington, DC working on that, that we did not really have any value-added to add to it, and so we made the conscious decision not to do that. And that remains true to this day—we certainly work on organic agriculture in many, many ways, and have since the get-go, in marketing, in agricultural research, in credit, crop insurance, and on and on. So we're heavily involved in organic agricultural issues and lobbying around them, just not in the National Organic Program, the certification program, per se. I still think that's probably the right choice. I don't know if it will remain that way forever, but I like to joke that when there's an organic caucus meeting called on Capitol Hill, 20-plus lobbyists show up, and if there's a sustainable agriculture session on Capitol Hill, you only need one hand to count the people who are there. So there are just so many more organic lobbyists, which is partly a function of so many organic companies, and of each one having their own counsel and lobbying team, and their own trade association, obviously, so it's just been a decision that, while that's important and there's a lot of work to be done to make sure that there's integrity within the National Organic Program, it's not something that NSAC particularly needs to spend its time and money on.

RK: It does come into the picture maybe more so now than back then with the beginning farmers, does it not, since a lot of beginning farmers look towards the organic side, with the market availabilities that are there to get going?

FH: Beginning farmer is, again, another issue that's always been front and center for NSAC. Starting in the 1990 Farm Bill there were some things there in the credit title that we helped to do. One was giving beginning farmers a priority for those conservation loans from USDA. Also, because of the farm crisis and because of the way the Reagan and then the Bush administration were trying to phase out what was then the Farmers Home Administration, we played an

important role in saving the Farmers Home Administration. Then after 1994 it became Farm Service Administration, and part of it went to rural development, but at the time it was still Farmers Home, and we reestablished, through law, the supervised credit. In other words that it should be a hands-on, they should be working with all farmers, but beginning farmers in particular in a hands-on, supervised credit kind of way. That was being phased out rapidly. Market placement, so the idea that one should be a Farmers Home borrower for a period of time, and then when you were more commercially viable, it was time to move on to commercial credit, sometimes with government guarantees, so we put that into the bill. Inventory land was a huge issue then, again coming out of the farm crisis in the '80s. So much land was being foreclosed on or otherwise returning after loan defaults to USDA ownership, and the question was—what's going to happen to all that land? So one of the things that NSAC did in the 1990 Farm Bill was put in that that land should be offered to beginning farmers, at least for a period of time, and we continued to work on that issue in successive farm bills. There's an issue today that has pretty much fallen by the wayside, because there isn't government inventory, or at least not much to speak of, which, all things considered, is a really good thing. It means that the default rate is extremely low, and there's not government inventory to worry about, but back then it was a huge issue, and we were successful in getting a lot of that land offered and taken by beginning farmers. So we worked on beginning farmers from the get-go, and then in 1992, really with a lot of leadership from the Center for Rural Affairs and their staff, but also working through the Sustainable Ag Coalition office in DC. This was back in the day when Congress didn't just throw every ag issue into the farm bill like they do today, so credit bills and rural development bills and ag research bills would still happen; authorization bills would happen outside the context of the farm bill. So in 1992 there was a credit act. It was almost entirely beginning farmer issues that drove that credit act. Tim Penny from Minnesota was our big champion for that. We introduced a bill and we've continued that process down through each successive farm bill iteration now. We introduce a new beginning farmer bill, the issues change, but the idea that we will have a marker bill that will set an agenda around the needs of young and beginning and new farmers, not all of whom are young, has always been part of our mission. You're right that a lot of that interest is today in local food, but also in organic agriculture, but not only. The interest is pretty broad-spread. So we keep that fundamental to our mission, because, after all, our mission is to make sure that mid-scale, family farm agriculture survives and thrives into the future. A big part of that is making sure that there are new generations of farmers coming along, and that there's actually programs there. And so I'm really proud of the fact that there were no beginning farmer programs per se at the Department of Agriculture from 1862, when it started, until, well actually, the 1987 Emergency Credit Act, and then the 1990 Farm Bill, where we really put it on the landscape. Now, granted, the department was always doing things that related to beginning farmers, but the fact now that there are not only specific programs for beginning farmers, but you have the very top level of USDA thinking about it as a critical issue, and who and how the next generation of farming is going to come into business. They now treat it as part of their mission, but it definitely was not part of their mission in the late 1980s. And we also met a fair amount of resistance, more so then than now, from members of Congress, who would say things like that's not the role of the farm bill, or that's not the role of the Farmers Home Administration. Or, it is the role, but we don't want young people to get started in agriculture until we can improve prices or until farm income is better—whatever. There was always some hesitancy and some excuse. It's a great issue to work on, because there's widespread support. There's no farm organization or commodity organization or agribusiness lobby, for that matter,

who's against beginning farmers. It's sort of motherhood and apple pie, but I always say the support is ten miles wide and about one inch deep, so as soon as you get to the—OK, now there's very little money left on the farm bill table and where is it going to go, and where they're trying to get some of it into a beginning farmer program, you find that many of the organizations that purport to support you then suddenly have other priorities. So it's been bedrock for us that we're always there fighting for that. And what's different about the landscape today is now you have young farmer organizations, some regional, some state-based, and national ones that are now in existence, and can play and amplify the role that we've historically played, and that's delightful to know that it doesn't just fall to NSAC to do beginning farmer work anymore. There are other people who are organized nationally and in key congressional districts who want to play that role, too, and many of them are young farmers themselves, and that makes it all the more exciting.

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RK: Well, before we move on forward to, say, the '96 Farm Bill, what you were just saying about beginning farmers made me think about minority farmers. What role has NSAC played in that over the years, especially the earlier years, saying up to the mid-'90s?

FH: Minority farm issues have, I think, always been part of our discussion, because we started in the Midwest and really only went national in 2002, and because Midwest agriculture is less diverse than some of the other regions of the country, it hasn't played an outsized role, maybe arguably it should have, but we have played a role, and so even before NSAC existed in the emergency credit and farm credit system bail-out in 1987, through work I was doing for the Center for Rural Affairs at the time—this was before NSAC started—we were able to get into law that the Farmers Home Administration had to reserve or set aside a portion of their loans for socially disadvantaged minority farmers. That happened through our work, and then once it was in law, then other organizations who directly represented minority farm organizations were able to pick up that ball and run with it and amplify it further. But we sort of set the stage for that. Likewise, we've been involved for decades now in the outreach and assistance program for socially disadvantaged farmers, and always have it amongst the things we are fighting for in the annual appropriations bill, and now it's actually, in more recent years, funded through the farm bill directly as well, so we've been a good partner, I think, on that, though we obviously let minority farmer-based organizations take the lead. The most important thing on this issue in more recent times is that we have a diversity committee within NSAC that's operated for multiple years now. We're about to adopt a racial equity statement that will be on our website and will help inform our work. We've just very recently, in 2015, added racial equity and diversity criteria to our priority setting process. Maybe most importantly since we've become a national organization we now have member organizations that represent farmers and other people involved in agriculture who are people of color, and so that has sort of changed the way we go about setting our agenda and the issues we work on, so I think we're about to launch into a new phase where those issues where maybe in the past we've relied more on sister organizations to lead the charge, where I think we're going to make more part and parcel of what we do more directly, so that's just changing right now and will be significant for the future.

RK: Moving on from the '90 Farm Bill and even the '92 Ag Credit Act, let's look at the progress made in 2004 with the USDA Reorganization Act and then the next farm bill, the '96 Farm Bill.

FH: The USDA reorganization was important—so this was in 1994. It was probably most important to us for two reasons. One, there was this big debate over, now that there was beginning to be conservation programs as part of the farm bill, with mandatory funding and fairly significant on the landscape, who was going to run them? Was it going to be what we today call the Farm Service Agency, or was it going to be what today we call the Natural Resources Conservation Service, both of whom got that name as a result of that '94 reorganization act. So that was a big debate. We came down very clearly on the side of what was then the Soil Conservation Service, what became the Natural Resources Conservation Service, should get those programs to implement. That was important to us so that they always had a stronger conservation integrity to them, but it was hugely controversial. You had an agency that primarily provided technical assistance, that did not have program staff to speak of, just wasn't set up to do that, so there were questions about was it even feasible. But you also had the ASCS, or what today is Farm Service Agency, badly wanting to continue. This was payments to farmers, but for different reasons, and they wanted to run all of the programs. So it was hotly debated. We came down on the side we came down on, you know, played a role. There were lots of organizations involved in that debate, but that was important. And then the other really important thing was the division of Farmers Home Administration and the Farmers Home Administration as an agency, with the farm part of that going to what became Farm Service Agency, and the rural development part of that going to the new rural development, Rural Business & Cooperative Service Agency. We had lots of fears around that, some of which were borne out in reality. A lot of the loan making capacity and knowledge and expertise went to rural development, leaving less at the farmer side, and yet those programs were hugely important, and we had just won, two years earlier, had just won this major redirection of credit funds to beginning farmers, from very little beginning farmer lending from USDA to the majority of lending going to beginning farmers. So it was a huge change that we legislated in 1992, and it was just implemented beginning in 1994, and here the same year, the agency that was implementing it was going to go away. So we were very concerned, got involved in those issues, and were able to make sure that none of codification of these important changes for beginning farmers were going to go away, as they did the reorganization. So that was primarily that story; there were other interesting sidelights to it, but I think that was the major take-away. And then the very next year, 1995, was a farm bill year, or it should have been, because the 1990 Farm Bill expired, and Congress started in on the 1995 Farm Bill, but it was the first of what's now become a successive series of farm bills that didn't start and finish in the same year, and took extensions and other ways of kicking the can down the road for a year or two before they came to fruition. So in '95, it finally finished in '96. We went through another whole process of developing a platform and an agenda, now not only at the level of the Midwest Sustainable Ag Working Group and the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, but now as part of the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture. So other working groups had grown up in the south and the northeast and the west, in California and all became part of the national campaign. So now there were almost overlapping policy platform development processes, one within Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, and one within the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture. We tried to coordinate that a lot so that they would be common agendas, but that was also part of, on the organizational side, part of the mix for that. In terms of that farm bill, I suppose just picking out a

few of the highlights—one was saving all of the targeting of loan money to beginning farmers and actually improving them to some degree. Senator Lugar from Indiana was now the chair of the committee, and we did a lot of work to make sure he was going to be tracking with us on that. It was a major effort to make that happen and to save those programs and actually improve them to some extent, so that was important. But perhaps the biggest thing was the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Up until then the major cost share program for conservation was the Ag Conservation Program, ACP. It was run through what was now the Farm Service Agency. It had funded, over the years, many things like land leveling and wetland drainage and liming and fertilizing fields that if they were ever of conservation benefit, they were kind of marginal benefits, and so we just said—this has to change. We need a program with more environmental integrity, more conservation integrity to it. But the other really significant thing that we saw happening was all of the conservation programs, and there were seven of them. They were all small, they were all subject to annual appropriations. They were discretionary; they weren't farm bill funded, and they were just being whittled away and whittled away and dying on the vine, essentially. And so the first staff person for NSAC besides myself was Elizabeth Mansager, eventually Elizabeth Higgins, who we hired on as a researcher, and she put together this research paper on the Water Quality Incentives Program, which was part of the 1990 Farm Bill, and one of those seven programs that was appropriated each year, and we wanted to see how that was working and evaluate it, so we did some of that. But at the back of that document that was evaluating WQIP, Water Quality Incentives Program, we put together a proposal saying—all of these programs should be streamlined, combined into one bigger program. This bigger program should have mandatory farm bill funding, and it should really prioritize environmental quality. That report in 1994 really set the stage for what became the Environmental Quality Incentive Program, and many of the conservation environmental groups, as well as the Sustainable Ag Coalition, worked together on making that happen again. Again, Senator Leahy and Senator Lugar played outsize role in that, introduced a marker bill. The early version of EQIP is notable for two reasons, both of which went away over time, one of which has come back, so, importantly, while it was available nationwide to farmers everywhere, it was also very targeted to specific watersheds and specific problem areas, and that was the focus from '96 until 2002 Farm Bill. That then got reversed in 2002 and sort of went away, but during the Obama administration years it's sort of come back, not because the farm bill changed, but because they just did it administratively to do some more targeting work through Environmental Quality Incentives Program. So we worked on that issue a lot, but we also worked on the CAFO (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation) issue, so one of the big things that helped achieve EQIP in the 1996 Farm Bill was support from livestock organizations, who felt like they got the short end of the stick, that most of the conservation money at USDA went to crop farmers, which it did, and they wanted more of it. So one of the big trade-offs in EQIP was saying that a very significant portion, 60 percent of it, would go towards livestock operations. And we did not oppose that. We thought the number should be different, but we didn't oppose the concept. But, importantly, we didn't want that money going to further consolidate the confinement operations, which were springing up all around the country. We wanted to make sure it was going for sustainable livestock systems and grazing and cow-calf operations and pastured poultry and hogs and not just all going into industrial, factory farm confinement operations. And so that became a really big deal. We campaigned very hard on that issue, and that original version of EQIP said that money could not go to that sector and that was an achievement politically that was carried, by a very significant degree, by Bob Dole from Kansas, who was running for president, and

Chuck Grassley, senator on the Agriculture Committee, from Iowa, where, obviously, the presidential caucuses take place early in the primary season. Grassley more or less convinced Dole that this was a winning issue, and Dole picked up the mantle and we were able to win EQIP without big subsidy for the CAFO industry. Sadly, that, too, went away in the 2002 Farm Bill. We weren't able to maintain it. At one point in time almost 30 percent of total EQIP money was going to fund new and expanding CAFOs, maybe, in part, because you sort of reach a saturation point on those operations, at some point. It's down below 15 percent today, but it's still a legitimate use of that money. And an issue that we continue to work on and continue mostly work on it to make sure that other uses of the livestock EQIP money are treated fairly and have a place at the table and so over time we've seen more money go into more of the sustainable systems, and we want to keep accelerating that process over time. But EQIP was really important.

(2:03:00)

And then another piece of the '96 conservation title that was really important to us, not initially, but over time, was something we called the Conservation Farm Option. The idea was you could enroll in the commodity program, but could not only not have the barrier of not being able to get your commodity payment if you were more diversified and doing resource conserving crop rotations, but that you could actually do that. You could do continuous cover cropping, you could do resource conserving crop rotations and actually get a conservation payment for it. And that was the basic idea behind the Conservation Farm Option. It became part of that farm bill, it got \$200 million dollars, which was very significant in those days, for mandatory money to implement that. Sadly, despite the fact that we worked on its implementation, the Clinton administration did not follow through, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service started out OK but lost steam, and actually none of that money got spent, and it was a heartbreaking loss for us, because conceptually it did exactly what we wanted. We had already won in 1990, removing some of the barriers to diversified rotations within the commodity programs, accelerated that in the '96 Farm Bill, where there was full planting flexibility. We weren't primarily responsible for the planting flexibility on the crop side—agribusiness really wanted that badly, and so they used their political muscle to do that. But where NSAC came into that story was we said—well, the same should be true for grass-based farming. If people are restoring pasture land that stupidly got put into crop land when prices were high, that should be able to be part of the commodity program, too, and not penalized for making those good choices of taking the highly erodible hillside out of soybeans, which it never should have been in and putting it back in grass and using it productively in a different way. So that was an NSAC victory. The champion on that was Senator Bob Kerrey from Nebraska, helped us get that over the finish line. So here we had achieved the flexibility part and the removing the barrier part, but we wanted the incentive part very badly. It was a crushing blow that the Clinton administration didn't do it. But two things good came out of it. One would have been great, had the presidential elections turned out differently, but Vice President Gore got very interested, and his staff got very interested, including from a climate perspective—how could we use the Conservation Farm Option as a climate mitigation tool. And so NSAC participated in the Climate Action Network Agriculture Group and put together some proposals, got them all the way up through the vice-presidential sign-off on some of these proposals. Had Gore won the election—some people say he did win the election—but had he become president, we probably would have been off to the races on

that, but he didn't. So the other significant thing was Senator Tom Harkin from Iowa became hugely interested in this, and so eventually we morphed what was the Conservation Farm Option into what became the Conservation Security Program, and through a series of marker bills with Senator Harkin introduced that in the late 1990s and into the early 2000s, and it eventually became part of the 2002 Farm Bill and still continues to this day. So that was another thing that where we were legislatively successful, implementation we weren't successful, but ultimately we were successful in turning it into a much larger program, and that program today includes 70 million acres of US agricultural land, the biggest conservation program that the country has ever had.

RK: And the Conservation Security Program is what you're talking about?

FH: Yeah, so it was called the Conservation Security Program in 2002, and then in 2008 became the Conservation Stewardship Program, so that's how it's known today. Conservation Stewardship Program currently, right now as we're taping this, has 70 million acres of farm and ranch land enrolled in advanced conservation systems. So that little germ of the Conservation Farm Option from 1996 has eventually turned into the biggest conservation effort that we've ever had.

(2:07:59)

RK: I've heard from some other folks that particularly, say, with the Land Stewardship Project, that think that's one of the most important programs to ever come out, because it does reward people who are doing the right thing to continue to do it, and even move up from there. But I understand it was also controversial among some circles, saying, well, these people are already doing it, why should they get funded? We really want new people to come in, which is also true. I know that was one of the issues around that program.

FH: The fight over how to set up the incentives within the Conservation Stewardship Program has been a long struggle, and it goes on to this day. From the farm program, farmer side of the equation, it makes sense to say that it doesn't really matter that much when somebody adopts advanced conservation. What matters is that they are actively managing it over time, showing continual improvement, keeping it on the landscape, and sending that as a signal to other farmers that a) it's not only possible agronomically and economically, but that it also can achieve these payments from the Department of Agriculture, sort of not only a seal of approval, but a seal of encouragement to continue to be innovative, to get more conservation on the landscape. So from that angle it makes total sense. From a different angle, sort of more coming from the purely conservation side, from maybe the conservation professional or the environmental management person or the person who's gone to school and gotten advanced degrees in environmental studies, they maybe tend to look at it more as—well, that's what people are doing without government incentives, so we certainly shouldn't even spend a penny on any of that. We should just focus the money in problem areas to get the most basic conservation on the landscape where possible. From our vantage point that program has a role, and we call that EQIP, and we don't need to have two programs that are doing the same thing. So we really need this stewardship program that's encouraging advanced conservation, not basic conservation, and that's doing it across the whole realm of resource conservation issues, and that there's no farm that can't do a

better job of conservation and environmental management. There are always issues, there's always new issues, and there's going to be increasingly new issues as a result of climate change, as a result of eventually the end of a petroleum-based farm economy. There are going to be many new environmental and conservation issues to tackle. We need a stewardship program that's encouraging people that where you're able to be in that program over a long period of time, as long as you're showing continual improvement and that's what we need. But trying to convince the Department of Agriculture is difficult. Trying to convince the environmental community is difficult, but so many federal programs outside of the realm of agriculture, you get you what you reward. And if what you reward is payments to bad actors to fix problems, that's what you're going to get. And if you reward advanced cutting edge stewardship and show that the government is willing to invest in that, then you're going to get more of that. And to us that just makes all the difference in the world. So right now, in 2015, USDA is again retooling the Conservation Stewardship Program, and once again we're debating this very same issue: Are there going to be adequate rewards for ongoing, active management of conservation systems, or are we going to retreat to an earlier era of farm policy where the only money available is to fix problems. We think there's a balance, and the program can do both things, but it's really important that fundamental to it is robust payments to reward farmers for actively managing those advanced conservation systems. If that falls by the wayside we'll be broken hearted. So, needless to say, it's been a major campaign of ours for this year.

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RK: Maybe we should look forward, now again, to at least touch on a few things with the 2008 Farm Bill, and even some of the things that were leading up to it. It's hard to cover everything, because one of the things, as you pointed out, there's just more and more programs coming into the picture, especially when you bring in the food issues that have emerged more recently. But I would like to hear about especially 2008 and some particular landmarks leading up to it.

FH: A couple lead-ins to the 2008 Farm Bill—we never look away from any possibility or any opportunity on Capitol Hill, and in 2000 there was a decision within the agricultural community and within the crop insurance company community that Congress needed to do much more subsidies within crop insurance, and so there was a 2000 crop insurance act called ARPA (Agriculture Risk Protection Act) that was doing this. We were somewhat engaged in the crop insurance issues, but we were also looking at this bill as a place, as an opportunity for anything that we could do. And so, importantly, we started a program that we still work on to this day called the Valued Added Producer Grant Program, working very closely with Senator Grassley, and then later with Senator Harkin, both from Iowa, on establishing this program. Value added activities and enterprises has always been an important part of sustainable agriculture, how to get some rewards from the marketplace for farming in different ways, and creating products that consumers are demanding, those kind of high quality food products that the Value Added Producer Grant Program can fund farmers to help do the business and marketing side of. So that emerged out of the Crop Insurance Act. It certainly wasn't on the table going into the bill that it would include this, but the funding, the Value Added Producer Grant Program is still authorized under the Crop Insurance Act. It's funded through the farm bill now, but that's how it got its start. Another thing we did then, there was another point of time in that legislation where the chairman of the committee had a major proposal on the table that wasn't getting any support, so

the rank and file of the committee was going in a completely different direction, and he sort of gave up on his proposal, realizing that there weren't the votes to do it, and the members sort of feeling bad for sort of trumping the chairman on it, sort of said—well, we can fund some things that you want to do. For whatever reason, he wasn't all that interested in that [Chuckles], so I was sitting there licking my chops thinking—oh, they just put money on the table, and nobody's claiming it. So working with Senator Leahy's staff, we went back and scrambled and put together a Risk Management Payment Program for partnership programs and conservation programs, where you could get risk management money to do conservation and research. That also is still funded to this day out of the crop insurance pot of money. So, again, nothing that anybody thought would happen out of that bill, but it's an ongoing program. It's funded many really good beginning programs and minority farmer programs, both in crop insurance, but also just in how to do farming in ways that reduce risk through better conservation, through better value added, through a variety of diversification techniques. So that was important. So we always look for the opportunities. In 2002, one of the opportunities was political. Senator Jeffords, who was a Republican, became a Democrat, flipping control of the Senate right in the middle of the farm bill process, making Senator Tom Harkin the chairman of the committee. We had already worked on our platform for that bill and had many things already in play, but definitely accelerated that with Senator Harkin as chair, so we authorized a lot of programs in 2002, most importantly the Conservation Security Program, which we already talked about. But we authorized a bunch of smaller programs, most of which did not immediately have payoffs, but on the long term had payoffs. So the Farmers Market Promotion Program was in the 2002 bill. The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program was in that bill. The National Organic Certification Cost Share Program was in that bill. Some of them started out with some initial funding in that farm bill cycle, but the 2008 Farm Bill is where we were able, again with huge support from Senator Harkin and many others, were able to put significant dollars in those programs. So sometimes the gestation period lasts for awhile. You get the authorization doesn't necessarily mean you get the funding right away, but if you keep hammering on it you do. So we, over time, have created a lot of programs. Farmers Market Promotion Program's a good case in point. We did eventually get appropriators to appropriate a little money for it, but it wasn't enough, and by the time the 2008 Farm Bill happened, we had put significant money into it through the farm bill directly, so we didn't have to go to appropriators. That allowed the program to develop and take off. It has a huge clientele. They are always inundated with proposals, and then in the 2014 Farm Bill, with Local and Regional Food Systems playing such a big, important role, that program has now morphed into the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program, so it has two different portions to what it's trying to do, and now the funding level is \$30 million a year, so it's a very significant program. So that's another thing that we do. Sometimes from the initial authorization, in this case in 2002, it took all the way to 2014 before it became a major program on the landscape, even though there were smaller versions of it earlier-on. So we've created a bunch of programs, whether it's Value Added Producer Grant or National Organic Certification Cost Share Program, or the Business and Industry Loan Guarantee Program for Local and Regional Food Enterprise, and on and on—it's quite a list. Significantly, all those things happened, either in the 2002 or 2008 Farm Bill, or in some cases even before that. So the pieces were there because NSAC invested the work and found the champions and got legislation through, working with our champions on Capitol Hill, then worked at the administration level to make sure that the programs got up and funded. So then fast-forward to 2009 and the beginning of the Obama administration. Secretary Vilsack becomes

the secretary at USDA, and Kathleen Merrigan, who came out of the sustainable and organic farming community, gets the nod to be deputy secretary, and shortly thereafter she starts the *Know Your Farmer Know Your Food* initiative, which has become quite popular and well-known around the country, a terrific initiative to really boost that segment of agriculture that's really marketing into the local and regional food market, which is one of the fastest growing consumer markets. So a great idea—it really helps small and mid-scale farmers. It really helped beginning farmers, and it really helped grow the local and regional food segment of the economy. But that initiative was just an initiative. It was a way to say this is something USDA cares about, but an initiative can't exist without programs and funding and almost all of what went into the *Know Your Farmer Know Your Food* initiative were programs that NSAC had helped create in the early 2000s and the mid-2000s, so that the building blocks were there, and when somebody came in, like Kathleen, with the vision to try to put it all together and to turn it into something bigger than just the individual building blocks, that those raw materials were there to work with. Another thing about that initiative besides the success it's had, in terms of getting those farm bill and some not farm bill programs working in synch with each other, has been just how much it has freed up people at the Department of Agriculture, who may have cared a whole lot about local food, or may have cared a whole lot about beginning farmers, or may have cared a whole lot about organic agriculture, but were sort of afraid to say so or do much about it in earlier times, to have a leadership team of both Secretary Vilsack and Deputy Secretary Merrigan saying it's OK was just a freeing moment, to have people really come out of the woodwork, so to speak, and really develop things. So then that gave us, as NSAC, a new opportunity to develop administrative initiatives, where we didn't have to go back to Congress, and we could just say—well, now that you're doing this, what about thinking about this idea. So just to put some concrete things on that, one of them was the Hoop House Initiative, which was through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program, where now farmers can get EQIP money to build hoop houses and really do season extension in fruits and vegetables. It's gone like gangbusters. Another one was microloans. So through FSA credit to farmers, all farmers, but particularly beginning farmers, being able to make those small-size loans that are more appropriate to farmers just starting out, but do so without all the usual degree of difficulty in loan making, rule making and loan making paperwork, trying to make it quicker and easier. That has also gone like gangbusters. They're doing lots of microloan businesses. Another example was there's a Farm Storage Loan Program that has existed for decades and decades, and basically provides Commodity Credit Corporation dollars to farmers to build grain bins or potato storage, and that's where the bulk of the money has gone. But we said—hey, look there's new food safety rules coming down the pike. You've got all this interest, particularly amongst younger farmers in the local and regional food space that are in fruits and vegetables. This is farm storage facilities, you know; cold storage and packing houses and washing sheds should all be part of this program. Through a series of initiatives at Farm Service Agency, that's now the case, where packing sheds and cold storage is now legitimate use of this money. One of the great things about that program is it neither has to be funded by the farm bill or by the Appropriations Committee. It's just permanent funding that goes all the way back to the New Deal through the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps). So it's a great opportunity to put funding into that. So, anyway, it's a long way of saying that the things that we worked on in successive farm bills early in the 2000s to create these programs really then amped up because of political support at the department to really make it greater than the ... the sum being greater than the pieces, where individually ... and then it gave us the opportunity to go back and say—hey, but what about this and what about

that. So it's been a really important part of NSAC's work, and just that whole, you know, nobody in 1988, that I recall anyway, so much talked about local and regional food systems, though the concepts were sort of there, the way we talked about them were different. But over time, clearly, marketing issues and food issues have become more and more important. We started NSAC with three committees: conservation, research, and farm programs, and added marketing in the early '90s, Marketing and Rural Development. We now call it Marketing Food Systems and Rural Development. Again, fast-forwarding closer to today, that's become a huge piece of our work, so it's been interesting to watch the evolution of that. The marketing side of things were important from the beginning, but once we were able to add the programmatic pieces at USDA, it's become that much bigger. And as consumer demand for high-quality local and regional food products has continued to increase, you've got more farmers who are wanting to invest in it, and it's become a much more legitimate part of the conversation.

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RK: When I look through the list of accomplishments more recently, from 2008 into 2014 Farm Bill, so much of it, too, is the notion of getting mandatory funding for programs, so that these battles don't have to be fought over and over again for appropriations. Talk a little bit about that.

FH: Mandatory funding is not the only thing that farm bills are about, but money is a lot of what farm bills are about, and so it's been a really important evolution. The Conservation Reserve program, back in 1985 was the first time there was mandatory funding for a conservation program, and then we built on that in 1990 with the Wetland Reserve, then built on it again in 1996 with Environmental Quality Incentive Program, and then again in 2002 with Conservation Security, now Conservation Stewardship Program, so over time that's increased to now we have close to \$6 billion a year in conservation funding that's direct, mandatory conservation funding through the farm bill. So that became a big deal. That was a hurdle, a very significant hurdle. Even a bigger hurdle was saying the same model should apply across the board of farm bill issues. Why should the only discussion of a farm bill be how much is going to go for commodity subsidies and how much is going to go to the food stamp or SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance) program? Why isn't rural development legitimate? Why isn't agricultural research legitimate? Why isn't marketing and food systems legitimate? So a lot of what NSAC has done has been leading the charge on that fight, so in the 1996 Farm Bill, small program but important precedent, the Fund for Rural America. It was half research funding and half rural development funding. It came about towards the end of that farm bill. We had strong support from Secretary Dan Glickman that was the head of USDA at the time. But it was really another one of those—let's go in there and just try to make the case that rural development and ag research are as legitimate subjects for farm bill funding as commodity subsidies, as food stamps, as conservation. So we got \$300 million dollars. There wasn't a lot of money, but it was something to start with. It only lasted a few years, and eventually the appropriators in the annual appropriations bill pulled the plug on it, but it turned the corner and said—oh, maybe some of these other ideas aren't so crazy as they seem. The next thing was the 1998 Research Act, so, again, back in the '90s and the '80s, and in the '90s Congress did things outside of the farm bill directly. 1998 was one of those years when there was an ag research bill. Senator Lugar, who chaired the committee, was very committed to putting mandatory money into research, and we worked with him and created the initiative for future agriculture and food systems, which was

competitive grant funding across the board. It wasn't necessarily sustainable agriculture, or primarily sustainable agriculture, but we thought—we are a legitimate player, we can go after and try to get some of this money—not us, per se, but researchers and educators and the extension people who were doing sustainable ag and food systems work could get it. So we worked with them, and, again, that was successful. We got mandatory funding for that, so each successive bill we've been able to build on that, and so the high point for any issue that's not one of the big three, the big three being commodity and crop insurance, food stamps and conservation, but outside of that, the 2014 Farm Bill is now the new high-water mark, where you have money for specialty crop research and specialty crop block grants, and the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion, and Beginning Farmer Development Program. The list goes on and on of programs that now get direct farm bill mandatory money. In fact, I find it interesting, being an old-timer now, to see so many young lobbyists, and interest groups even, who don't have staff that have been around as long think that this is just the way things are, and don't realize that each and every one of these was a huge fight to get over the conceptual hurdle of this not being legitimate. There are still many members of the Agriculture Committee, both House and Senate, who still don't really view it as legitimate and gripe about it and complain about it endlessly, but I feel like we're over the hump, and it's not going to go away. I think that's really healthy for a real farm and food policy discussion. Now the discussion is a little bit more—we're not there yet, but it's moving towards what are we doing in farm and food policy, and what's deserving of farm bill support, as opposed to when we started as NSAC on the farm bill where there was even a fight over whether a second conservation program could possibly be added to the mix, to the one that started in 1985. Anything beyond that was just laughed out of the room. Rural communities—they don't deserve farm bill money. Ag researchers—they just get appropriations, why should there be any farm bill money for that? So I think we've made very, very significant headway, to the point where it's now just sort of accepted fact, which is great.

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RK: I was wondering, too—as you're talking, increasingly the word food has been coming up through our discussion, and, clearly, the interest by the public, by other legislators and the whole food system, concerns about healthy food, regional food, has really been playing an increasing influence on NSAC over the years, right?

FH: The food movement, if you can call it that, is definitely playing a role. Even within our NSAC member organization constituency we have more groups than we had initially that maybe come at things more either from a food primary point of view, or an urban agriculture primary point of view, or even a more consumer angle on things. We still demand that all member groups have direct work and relationships with farmers, so we're not open to just any group that comes along, but, certainly, increasingly over time membership has shown more diversity in that respect. So that's played a big role internally; it's also played a role in our agenda setting. The biggest example of that, perhaps, in recent times has been all the work that we've done since 2009 around the Food Safety Modernization Act, which we treat primarily as a farmer issue—what are farmers going to be asked to do in a regulatory context in terms of food safety—but the rest of the world views primarily as a consumer issue and what is the consuming public facing in terms of potential food safety issues. So that's been a really interesting piece of work. It puts us in different committees of Congress and different agencies implementing it outside of the Ag

Committee and USDA context that we're usually working on. We've made tremendous headway on that. That's a whole fascinating story in and of itself. We came in kind of late to the debate. In 2009 the bill in the house was already well underway by the time we started intersecting with it, and we attempted quickly to develop some key things that we could do and actually had some floor amendments that gave the then Democratic majority leadership some tizzy fits, but we weren't able to successfully do anything. But then the Senate was taking it up sequentially starting the next year, and we made a major play, wound up with a group of 10 senators that worked very closely with us, and not only worked with us, but worked with each other. We sort of formed a little caucus of Senate offices and wound up, eventually, having eight major amendments, a couple of them in committee and the rest of them on the floor of the Senate. It was one of those rare legislative moments where we won all eight of the amendments that we set out to do, and all eight of them have proven to be really critical in the very long rule making and implementation process. So the rule making is still going on here in late 2015, two of the biggest rules have just gone final so that the Food Safety and Modernization Act of 2010 has yet to have been implemented on the ground in 2015. Now, the rule making processes will probably be completed pretty close to the end of 2016; the implementation phase still comes after that. So we are very engaged on conservation issues, on value-added and farmer identity-preserved marketing issues, on regulatory issues, making sure that local and regional food is still viable in the days of heightened regulatory concern, to make sure that the new rules aren't contrary to the national organic program rules. We've been involved in a very multi-faceted way on a wide range of issues, really representing a lot of different kinds of farmers, but especially farmers engaged in the local and regional markets and in the direct farmer-to-consumer markets in fruits and vegetables. So for an organization that started maybe more focused on grain and livestock and dairy in the Midwest to, now, being the central player on small and mid-scale fruit and vegetable farming operations, where most, though not all of the primary organizations at the grassroots level are on the coasts, is just a very significant thing. It puts us in a different context. We are still being responsive to our member organizations, who have grown and now represent a wider variety of agriculture, but the core principles remain the same, and it's just that the focus of the discussion is now with the Food and Drug Administration over a whole new set of regulations that we've had to become expert in, but bringing that sort of farmer, ground-truth message to the Hill and to the regulatory agencies has been based on everything we learned about doing that on farm bill programs with USDA, now just applied in a very different way. So that's been a really interesting part of our trajectory over the last few years.

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RK: I want to move towards the future and your views where we need to go with NSAC, more immediately, and its priorities, and even out further than just the next farm bill. But before we do, I want to touch back on one more kind of internal concern, and that is when did NSAC become NSAC—when did it become the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition? When did this merger with the campaign happen? Give the story around that and explain how that happened.

FH: The story of how the National Sustainable Ag Coalition became that is an evolutionary one, so going all the way back—Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, 1988, then the other regional SAWGs taking shape in the early 1990s. Soon thereafter the National Campaign for Sustainable

Agriculture—it actually started as the National Dialog on Sustainable Agriculture became the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture. So we operated in a kind of sister organization way, they doing more work on the grassroots side, we doing most of the work on the direct advocacy side, but working with all those additional Sustainable Ag Working Groups around the country. So that was all part of the story, and then in 2002 the Sustainable Ag Coalition decided to go national. Up until then our membership was primarily from the Midwest. We decided to open it up, and so our membership doubled in size as we started taking in organizations from all regions. That was significant in and of itself, but that was long before the merger. In 2007 and going into 2008, it became clear that the two organizations really needed to be one for a whole variety of reasons. So discussions started—I kept reminding people throughout that that 2007 and 2008 were farm bill years, and we were busy. So we tried; in 2007 we said let's wait until 2008. But then the 2007 Farm Bill didn't happen until 2008. To make a long story short, we sort of multi-tasked and did both things together, and went through a long merger process in 2008. That led, then, to the actual merger which took effect January 1, 2009, so the Sustainable Ag Coalition became the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. The staff was primarily the Sustainable Ag Coalition's staff in Washington, DC, though one of the staff people for the National Campaign stayed on as our grassroots organizer. So that really transpired then, and we made room at the table for Sustainable Agriculture Working Groups. They also were evolving throughout all this time. So the Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, ironically, which was the first one no longer really exists at all. The California Sustainable Agriculture Working Group also doesn't exist anymore, though there is a California caucus within NSAC. The Western Sustainable Working Group still exists, but it doesn't have much going on operationally. So the two that are really still going strong are the Northeast Sustainable Ag Working Group and the Southern Sustainable Ag Working Group. They're both actually also have evolved very differently themselves, each from the other. Any SAWG that still exists is welcome to become a member of NSAC, and, indeed, they are. So that sort of carries over from the older days into the newer days, but it's not as central an organizing principle as it once was. Though we are at the point, organizationally, where we're beginning to have discussions again about whether we might eventually have the capacity for regional organizers, and so maybe we'll come full circle back around to that sort of initial impetus for having those regional working groups.

RK: Well, the groups like the Midwest Sustainable Agriculture group, while they are not there as a formal, or close to formal, group, they are still very much involved, those groups are. They've just been integrated into the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, correct?

FH: It's very interesting to see the organizational longevity of memberships of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and its predecessor coalitions. Some members come and go, but over the long haul the vast majority of them stay, and so if you go back and look at the 1988 role, most all of those, at least amongst the organizations that still exist, are still members. If you look at the Midwest Sustainable Ag Working Group from the '90s when it was going full tilt, most of those organizations are still part of the National Sustainable Ag Coalition. The same is true of most of the other regional SAWGs and that's really important, because it gives us a strong base of people who ... maybe the staff people have changed over time, but organizationally there's been this commitment, and this interest in the issue. So whether it's a high policy capacity group, or a lower policy capacity group, the fact that they are in it for the

long haul becomes tremendously important, I think, as part of our success as a movement and as an organization is that we can draw on this rich history of involvement and go back and look at documents from six farm bills ago and see that they are still really relevant ideas, and some of the same organizations are pushing some of the same things today, you know, in a different context, different iteration, but the same basic idea that lies behind it. I think we've been blessed in that way, and not just organizationally, but also in terms of actual individual people who have stuck it out through all these years and are now this reach-deep reservoir of historical knowledge that newer members of the movement can draw on, so we've been totally blessed in that way.

(2:45:46)

RK: Well, Ferd, we've been talking a good deal about the progress and successes that have been made over the years and they are, indeed, significant, but I think we also need to address what really hasn't worked, or what hasn't been accomplished that still does need to happen, and then we can look towards the future to discuss how we're going to try to deal with some of those things. What have been some of those disappointments that you've seen?

FH: There are certainly tough issues and plenty of disappointments over time. We've tended to divide issues up into three categories as we think through them. One is removing barriers, eliminating issues that farmers are having with current policy. We've been somewhat successful in that area. Another one is sort of building those beachheads to create the new kind of agriculture and the new kind of food system that we want to see. We've been very successful in doing that. The third sort of category is the big structural, sort of more transformative changes, and we have, quite frankly, not fared very well in that category, and it's obviously really, really important. So, some examples—each and every farm bill, and in between farm bills, we work on issues like payment limitations, so that farms aren't using commodity subsidies to get bigger and bigger and put family farms at a disadvantage and continue to hollow out rural communities—an incredibly important issue—we've actually made progress on paper in terms of votes in Congress and amendments that pass, but we have never actually succeeded in changing the rules of the road. The powers that be are very strong, and to bring that up to current day, the Obama administration is going to have had two chances to enforce the law and makes rules that are effective and put at least some caps on payments. It had an opportunity early-on and finalized a rule in 2010 that almost completely left things status quo, as to what he inherited, despite the fact that when he came to Iowa in 2008 as a candidate, very explicitly ran on payment limitation reform as part of his platform. So that was discouraging. And now, again, just probably later this month, in December of 2015, we'll have the second bite at the apple, and, again, we'll do pretty much the same thing. And so that's deeply discouraging. That's just one issue, but I use it as an indicator of how hard it is to take real money away from mega-farms, when their lobby is so strong. Another great example is the work we've done around livestock industry and competition in the packer and processing part of livestock and passed landmark legislation in the 2008 Farm Bill, with Senator Harkin and others leading the way to begin to insist that USDA write effective rules for the Packers and Stockyards Act, which has been the law of the land since 1921, and here in 2008 and still today, there is no rules to implement the law. And so Congress directed that and gave some very specific things they needed to do in 2008. There, the Obama administration did begin to promulgate rules and had a proposal on the table that wasn't perfect, but went a long ways, and we were supportive of pieces of it and wanted changes to other pieces

of it, and then Congress came back and, through the appropriations process, said USDA couldn't implement those rules, and, in fact ...

RK: What had those rules done, the Packers and Stockyards Act?

FH: The Packers and Stockyards Act sets the rules on livestock producers and poultry producers marketing their product through the packers and integrators, and establishes what's fair and what's not fair, and what's undue preferences and prices and what's not, and what are good contracts and not good contracts, so very, very important to any kind of future for family farm livestock producers. The rules would have gone a long way to making some of that real and giving farmers more of a voice at the table, and, again, the congressional backers of the multi-national corporations that today are the packers and the integrators just use this back-door mechanism to say USDA couldn't take those actions. Interestingly, as we are taping this in December of 2015, those appropriation provisions are not in this year's bill, and there's still a year to go in the Obama administration, so we're going to be working to try to get some of those—not all of them, but some of those rules, some of the most important contract reform rules back in play next year—we'll see. Whether or not that will be successful remains to be seen—important, but again a perfect example of something that has major structural ramifications where agribusiness is such a strong lobby that it's very difficult to make headway. Another example of something where in some respects we've been set back very badly is agricultural diversification, diversifying the landscape, diversifying the landscape mix, integrating crops and livestock has always been a key part of sustainable agriculture and a key part of what we've tried to do on policy. In 2007 Congress passed the second iteration of the Renewable Fuel Standard as part of the energy bill. While ethanol has been a big contributor to new wealth in the countryside and improved farm income from one perspective, from an agricultural diversification standpoint, it's been a disaster. So if you go back and track the 20 years prior to 2007, average corn acreage in this country on average was in the low-70 million acres a year, and since the Renewable Fuel Standard, our average corn acreage has been in the low-90 million acres, so 20 million acre increase, almost, close to a 20 percent increase in corn acreage, some of that coming out of grassland and out of pastureland. Some of it coming out of other commodity crops, and certainly not helping to implement less monoculture, more resource conserving rotations, and whatnot. So that's been really difficult. It's divisive because even the more progressive farm organizations are very gung-ho on ethanol and the Renewable Fuel Standard, and some of our friends in the environmental and renewable energy field are also gung-ho on that, yet from an agriculture sustainability viewpoint, it's not going the way it should be, and we need to really be boosting the cellulosic ethanol production, which has yet to really take off. Even there, to do it in ways that are supportive of family farm income and supportive of diversified rotation and supportive of rural communities, because you can monoculture anything and that's really not what we want to see. So it will be important, as the cellulosic ethanol crops come on line, that we do those right and not keep making the same mistake over and over again. So lots of big issues out there, and some we just have not been terribly successful in pursuing to where they need to be.

(2:54:470)

RK: We've seen the wonderful growth in concern among consumers, among urban people, among everybody, practically, in healthier food and regional food, and getting a more sustainable

food system, but at the same time the more industrial approach continues to dominate and seems more entrenched and powerful than ever in some ways. It's clear from the fact that there's pesticides turning up in organic production, for example. How can you have a sustainable system operating in this much bigger pool of unsustainability?

FH: Big, big issues around how to even conceive of the two-track agriculture we have with sort of more sustainable and organic and local and regional production going on at the same time that industrial conventional agriculture is going as strong as ever. I still like to think that part of the vision of sustainable agriculture is that we want to work on both tracks and move both in a more sustainable direction. I think some of that can be true, but there's also a very real feeling of we have two different types and styles of agriculture going on, so I don't know. It's something the movement's going to have to grapple with, how much we want to be a separate food system and how much we want to be an integrated food system. One of the really interesting issues right now, from a sustainable ag point of view, is both sustainable and organic agriculture have always had soil as primary and soil health as front and center as perhaps the single most important resource issue from which all the other ones flow. That goes back a century or more, and so it's been fundamental to sustainable agriculture as a movement, this interest in soil health. And what we see in just the last few years is soil health in general and cover cropping in particular has sort of jumped the fence and now become a hot topic in conventional grain production. That is to be applauded and to be accelerated and amplified, I think, as much as possible, both for the very real conservation benefits and climate benefits that it can lead to, but also in the sense that maybe as conventional grain farmers get more and more experience with cover cropping and they see what that does for their soil and what that does for their future productivity and for the diversification of the landscape, maybe they'll get a little bit of wildlife going on, they might view it as—oh, maybe now I'll try something else that these weird sustainable and organic farmers have been doing all these years. And so to not make a joke out of it, but I sometimes think conventional ag's new-found love affair with cover cropping is maybe the gateway drug that gets them not only cover cropping, but eventually really diversifying the landscape and reducing input use. One of the great things about using cover crops in a systematic way is that you suddenly see that your chemical input needs go way down, and when farmers, conventional or otherwise, see that, they're going to respond in, I think, positive ways to say—hey, if I don't have to be spending \$4.50 for every bushel of corn I produce, I could spend less than that by doing cover cropping, and maybe eventually doing diversified rotations—I mean, I think that has a potential of really making conventional ag a more sustainable conventional ag. And by the same token, you have, sadly, there are plenty of examples of organic farming operations out there who are certified, but who aren't really doing the conservation work that needs to be part of it. That's the exception, not the rule, certainly, in organic farming, so I don't want to paint that too starkly, but there's stuff that can be learned in all parts of agriculture, and I think that's one of the beauties. A lot of people debate should we be called regenerative agriculture or resiliency or resilient agriculture, which is the hotter buzz phrase today, or many other permutations of ... There's no magic adjective to use. I still like sustainable, and one of the things I like about it is that it's a vision statement. It's not an if you do x, y, and z, then you're sustainable—it's a vision. It's a vision for everybody, so conventional ag may have a longer road to go down to get to the sustainable, but sustainable farmers today are going to have a long road to go down as we get into a warmer climate, more extreme weather events, and, eventually, to this post-petroleum age that we will be in before we know of it. And that will mean new farming systems, or water

conservation, people getting out of irrigated agriculture into dry land farming. That will be a major change in some parts of the country, and so there's always a road to go down to become more sustainable.

RK: Speaking of vision, then, let's talk a little bit about the future vision for NSAC, the more immediate, what's kind of up for the next farm bill. But I'd like to also then go further, and maybe this gets somewhat personal to your own personal vision for what you'd like to see or how you envision a future for NSAC and the sustainable agriculture policy efforts going forward.

FH: Well, we have a lot to think about as we look at what the future ag policy priorities are going to be. It's always a hot topic of debate within NSAC as to what we're working on. One thing is very clear to us about the next farm bill. The 2014 Farm Bill really represented that moment in time where the Federal Crop Insurance Program became the primary part of the farm safety net. Not that we've done away with the commodity title of the farm bill, but it just plays a secondary role to crop insurance now, and all the things that we've worked on somewhat successfully, somewhat unsuccessfully over the years, whether that's payment limitations or income tests or conservation requirements, and all the rest, either don't apply at all in the crop insurance context, or only are initially being applied there, so we've decided that there needs to be a major campaign to really fundamentally reform the way federal crop insurance gets delivered and what happens at the farm end. So we're sort of dividing that campaign into four different segments. One is structure of agriculture, not surprisingly, a continuous theme throughout our history. Right now you could farm an entire county. You could farm two entire counties, and you would get paid crop insurance premium subsidies on every single one of those acres, and we think that's wrong. It consolidates agriculture, it puts family farms at a disadvantage, it locks beginning farmers out of the market, and so we really need to have that whole discussion. Why is this the only federal entitlement program with no limits and no income tests and no nothing? So that has to change. Conservation is another major plank. So we finally in the 2014 Farm Bill got conservation compliance reattached to crop insurance, so that's a start, but that's a pretty minimal level, especially if you're not in an area with wetlands. There's a lot more that needs to happen, so we not only want to expand the minimum that you have to do to comply with conservation provisions, we actually want to use crop insurance to encourage people to do advanced conservation. And we make the very important point that advanced conservation is risk management reduction, so if you're a crop insurer, you should want people doing the most they can do for conservation as a way to protect soil fertility and soil productivity, and to eliminate the risks that come from farming in harmful ways to the environment. So we want to really link those subsidies to conservation in a way that's never been done before. Then there's access. Beginning farmers have marginal access to crop insurance. Organic farmers have marginal access to crop insurance. Highly diversified producers, producers who are producing for local food markets and direct food markets have almost no crop insurance access, so there's a whole point about leveling the playing field so everybody is part of the crop insurance system. And then last, but not least, how the program gets delivered and how much of the federal subsidy goes to the companies and making that transparent. Right now you can't trace any of those payments. It's very murky, and if the taxpayer's going to be putting \$10 billion dollars a year into the till, we should have some reporting requirements and some transparency. So we're making that a major deal. I think we'll try to accelerate the interesting cover cropping

and try to make that even more central to our conservation programs and make climate as an issue central to conservation programs. It's been there in the background, but not really articulated, and I think there's some movement that needs to happen there. In the local/regional food economy space, I think there's room for a much bigger play. We've been successful in creating farm bill programs that can provide grant and loan money to organizations and to farmers getting more involved in that space, and even some guaranteed loan programs for fairly large-size businesses that are involved in creating regional food businesses of one kind or another. But now I think the investment need is huge, because the consumer interest is huge, and we're beginning to see more and more happen in communities and on the landscape, but the capital isn't there, the loan money, the equity investment. I think this is the time where farm credit system, the banks, and the community development financial institutions and the foundation world, through their investments, not just their grant making, need to play a role and need to come to the table and figure out how we're going to create this healthy food access, regional food economy of the future. Consumer demand is there; what's not there is enough infrastructure and delivery system to actually get consumers what they are demanding. So we need to figure out a way. I think we can, through the farm bill, create some mechanisms where some of that capital can come to the table and some of that financial ability can come to the table. So I think that's another whole area, and even beyond farm bill, when you think about regional food economy, there's the transportation part of it, there's the community development financial institutions part of it, there's the environmental protection part of it, there's the food safety part of it, so now we're way beyond USDA. We're Treasury Department, we're EPA, we're Food and Drug Administration, we're Labor, Health and Human Services—and they all have nascent programs. They don't all call them local/regional food programs, but they all have things that relate to that pretty directly, so I think that's another new frontier. We just held a meeting at the White House that NSAC helped to foment that had all those agencies represented and had practitioners from around the country, particularly food hub practitioners coming in and talking about what they're doing locally and what their financial needs are, and we're trying to stimulate this conversation, to try to make it not just how do we bring in the private markets and the lenders, but also how to get the other government agencies involved. If we're successful in that, that will really open up a really interesting discussion, and, I think, one that ... the interest amongst the local food, food-interested consumers, healthy food access interests, so much interest in how to get healthy food affordable for low-income consumers, a lot of interest in that area, and a lot of interesting things happening. I think you can put all of that together, perhaps, in some major government initiatives that we're only just beginning to dream about, but I think are possible, maybe even in the next farm bill, if not soon thereafter.

RK: Thank you, Ferd—it's been great. Thank you very much for all this time, and for all your work, and for going forward with this in the next farm bill and beyond, hopefully.

FH: Yeah, thank you, and looking forward to it.

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