

**National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
Roundtable**

**Ron Kroese
Moderator**

August 2, 2015

Participants:

Fred Kirschenmann—FK
Ann Robinson—AR
Michael Sligh—MS
Chuck Hassebrook—CH
Mary Fund—MF
Ferd Hoefner—FH
Margaret Krome—MK
Francis Thicke—FT
Amy Little—AL
Duane Sand—DS
Teresa Opheim—TO
Duane Havorka—DH

Moderator:

Ron Kroese—RK

RK: I want to welcome everyone to this roundtable discussion about the formation, development, and accomplishments of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition over the past three decades. I know each of you played a real important role in the work of NSAC and its predecessor of efforts, and we want to thank you for doing this work, first of all, and for coming here today to be a part of this discussion. So we're going to kick things off with a brief introduction from everyone. We'll start on that side with Fred.

FK: Hello, my name is Fred Kirschenmann, and I'm affiliated with the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University, and also the Stone Barn Center for Food and Agriculture in New York, and my wife and I live in Ames, Iowa.

AR: Ann Robinson, and I am currently Midwest regional office director for the National Center for Appropriate Technology, and I am in Des Moines.

MS: I am Michael Sligh with the Rural Advancement Foundation International in Pittsboro, North Carolina.

CH: I'm Chuck Hassebrook. I was formerly with the Center for Rural Affairs in Nebraska.

MF: I'm Mary Fund. I'm with the Kansas Rural Center. I'm also a certified organic farmer.

FH: Ferd Hoefner, policy director for the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition in Washington, DC.

MK: Margaret Krome, policy director for the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute in East Troy, Wisconsin.

FT: Francis Thicke. I'm a farmer from southeast Iowa here. I have a grass-based organic dairy farm, and we process our milk on the farm and market it all locally.

AL: My name is Amy Little. I am currently the policy director for the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group.

DS: I am Duane Sand. I am on the staff of Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Des Moines, Iowa.

TO: My name is Theresa Opheim, and I'm with Practical Farmers of Iowa, and I'm located in Ames, Iowa.

DH: I'm Duane Havorka, executive director of the Nebraska Wildlife Federation, and I live near Elmwood, Nebraska.

RK: Thank you, everyone. Well, we all know how important Ferd Hoefner has been to this effort over the past two decades, and a steady and continuing force for NSAC and its predecessors, so we thought it would be a good idea to start off with Ferd, to have him talk for awhile about how he got interested in sustainable agriculture, sustainable ag policy, even preceding the more formal efforts, going back to some of your earlier days. Then taking us up through the formation of ... we picked 1988, I believe, as the real start date, talking about some policies that have come on the books and some successes. Kind of take us through each farm bill over the next, say, 15 or 20 minutes, that kind of key our own thinking on our discussion that we'll take up after that. So, Ferd?

(3:08)

FH: Great. Well, I'll do my little personal intro like everybody else will do, and then talk a little bit more about the organization over the years. So, for me it really was the world food crisis, or the so-called world food crisis of the 1970s. That was really the setting. I was in undergraduate, I was studying agricultural development and working on the student farm and getting more and more interested in food policy in general. And then watching in the farming community, the go-go '70s of over-investment and speculation and the Russian wheat deal and the run-up in prices and that whole thing. So that was the context I was coming to Washington, DC for. I came to Washington, DC because I didn't wind up going to India. I was supposed to be there on a three-year agricultural development project, and it fell through at the very last minute. I had been doing some student organizing at the college level around the 1977 Farm Bill, and when India fell through, I decided—well, I'll go to Washington and see what this farm bill thing is all about. I hooked up with a member of Congress who was on the Agriculture Committee, and so the last

five or so months of that process, and became intrigued. I was also working for the National Student Association on their responsible agriculture program, which was their land grant accountability project at the time. So that was sort of the context then. I wound up becoming a world hunger intern for the United Methodist Church, which is why NSAC, to this day, is in the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill. And lo and behold, something called the American Agriculture Movement (AAM) came to Washington, DC. I was supposedly working for the Interreligious Taskforce on US Food Policy, on international agricultural development, but being the youngest one on the staff, when AAM came to town, they all said—we need to do a whole lot more on domestic ag policy—and they looked around the room and the last one hired and the youngest one in the room got the job. [All chuckle] So I was thrown in, having come from no farming background into this whole milieu. So I worked on reclamation reform. I worked on the farmer-owned grain reserve, the international emergency wheat reserve, the so-called “Raisin Bill,” for those who go back to that era, which did several things, but created the limited resource loan program that still exists to this day. And got more and more involved in Secretary Bob Bergland’s structure project, as it was called, at the Department of Agriculture. That, of course, resulted ultimately in the book, *A Time to Choose*, and the policy recommendations there, and so I was sort of a religious community advisor to that project. I did not really have much connection at that point to the organic work that Garth Youngberg was doing. I didn’t meet Garth until several years after that, but those two reports, of course, came out and were published just at the end of what became the single term of the Carter administration and were quickly thrown in the trash heap the following January when President Reagan came into office. So that was all part of the context that I was dealing with. A lot of things about those early farm bills that I worked on that might be interesting for another time, but a couple of relevant things, perhaps—in the 1981 Farm Bill there were three lobbyists, including myself, who were working on conservation compliance, getting thrown out of every office that we went into. Conservation compliance—what are you talking about? There’s no quid pro quo for getting farm subsidies. We got absolutely nowhere on that in 1981, but, obviously, four years later it became the law of the land, so that was an interesting experience. Also for the ’85 Farm Bill, formed a coalition of consumer, environmental, international development assistance, family farm groups and produced the booklet, “Beyond Crisis,” which set out policy proposals for that 1985 Farm Bill, many of which, though—not all of which—got adopted. And it was probably the last time in farm bill history where that broad a coalition actually functioned as a coalition. So that was kind of another interesting experience. But the very title of that, “Beyond Crisis,” sort of suggests that from the so-called rural food crisis of the ’70s, we were now into the so-called farm crisis of the 1980s. I always say “so-called” because it’s not like these crises ever go away, really, though they take particular forms at particular periods of times. So it was in that context, then, that I had left the Interreligious Task Force on Food Policy and went out doing work on my own for various organizations, was working on tax reform bill—that’s when I first met Chuck and worked with him on that. Worked for the Land Stewardship Project after meeting Ron, and did work on the crisis that was developing with insurance companies taking over farmland and ripping out conservation structures. That, in turn, got me involved with the Conservation Coalition. So the Conservation Coalition in DC, of all the major environmental and wildlife organizations, really got started in 1986-87, and has continued right up to this day. I’m by far and away the oldest continuously serving Conservation Coalition member that’s still active. So I was doing that, I was working for the Center for Rural Affairs on a beginning farmer piece of legislation that became part of the bail-out bill for the farm credit system in 1987, and then, lo

and behold, because of these various connections, there had been meetings in Omaha in late '87 that I wasn't at, but then Ron and Chuck called and said—why don't you come out to Wilder Forest for this meeting in early 1988, and that became the founding meeting for this whole thing. Bob Gray—who had left American Farmland Trust and was working for NCAT (National Center For Appropriate Technology) and some other organizations—and I came out together. It wasn't clear to us at all. We sort of had maybe an inkling that one of us might have some work to do as a result of this meeting, but it certainly wasn't clear at that point in time exactly what was going to happen. And then later, a second meeting in 1988 in Wisconsin—Kathleen Merrigan and Susie Dietrich and I came out for that one, and that sort of, I think, solidified the work that I launched into, at that point, as a hired contractor. In fact, I remained as a hired contractor, and all the way through hiring the first SAC (Sustainable Agriculture Coalition) employee, and then I switched over to employee status at that point. I forget what year that was. I think it was '93 perhaps. So it was quite a period of time where I was doing it on a contract basis. So anyway, that's a little bit about how I got there, and just fast-forwarding through the now 27 years, there have been, by my count, if you count both MSAWG (Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group), SAC, National Dialogue, National Campaign, National SAC, and now NSAC, there have been upward ... definitely over 75 meetings, the annual and bi-annual meetings, which is quite a few. I've sort of lost track. I used to keep a log of where each one was, and I've stopped doing that. There are over 40 fly-ins. I know there's been over 40; I don't know the exact number, but a very substantial number. One thing that I think is very interesting is from that very first meeting we set up the two-fold membership structure. We called it different things over different periods of time, but right now we call it participating members and represented members, and while that's taken different forms over time, it's still the way we work today, and I think has been enormously useful to the movement to be able to have that big tent place where lots of people can be involved and at a slightly higher level of participation, being in that represented member category. So I think that's worked well for us. We went through the establishment of the regional SAWGs—of which at one point there were five; now there are three—and the National Dialogue, and the National Campaign, and then SAC became National SAC, and then eventually the merger happened, and now we're the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, so there was that whole history. We've been through five farm bills together under this rubric, and 27 appropriation bills, though you kind of have to cheat to say—we worked on 27 bills; they all did not come to fruition [All chuckle], though most of them did. We've had, at least on the MSAWG, SAC part of this story, we've had five issue committees. We started with three—research, conservation, farm programs and beginning farmers. Those three still exist, so they've existed from 1988 through 2015 and on into the future. That's an incredible continuity, and we added marketing and rural development, now marketing food systems, and rural development in the mid-'90s, and then have added food systems and food safety much more recently. On the campaign side of the story there were five, six, seven committees at different times. Those have all been back incorporated since the merger into the five that we have today, but those are really important communities of knowledge and experience that have a very long continuity over time. You know, there's so many issues you can't even begin to try to cover them in a few minutes. I don't know if other people find it useful, but in my mind I divide issues into three categories. The barriers that we're trying to remove—so early on the work we did around the integrated farm management program and trying to put planting flexibility into the farm program, right on up into the current day where we're working on whole-farm revenue protection, to try to make crop insurance work for diversified operations,

and many, many points in between, but sort of removing those barriers that are stopping sustainable farmers from being able to benefit in the same way that others do. So that's one category. Then another category that in my mind I hold as a way to categorize things is beachheads—all the places at the Department of Agriculture and elsewhere where we've tried to seed our own programs and develop our own alternatives. So starting with the Sustainable Ag Research and Education Program, at the very beginning, through so many others—national organic certification, cost-share, and farmers market promotion and value-added producer grants—so many different things, right up until today when we're working on the farm-to-school program this year as Congress does child nutrition reauthorization, and many, many others. And the third category are sort of the big structural changes, and those have definitely been the hardest. We've succeeded, I think, to a significant extent, in the conservation arena, conservation compliance, Sodsaver, adding the working land conservation programs, which did not exist at all when we started, and now they're the biggest of the programs. But on the structure of agriculture side, on the payment limits on the competition, contract ag reform—those have proven much, much harder, and we continue to speak truth to power, but we don't necessarily prevail. So those are just some of the things that we've tried to tackle. One way to summarize it, perhaps, is in this last farm bill for those sort of beachhead programs that we've been working so hard on, we came away with nearly a billion dollars' worth of mandatory farm bill spending. Back in 1988 I don't think any of us could have imagined having Congress put a billion dollars into programs that we had created and worked to develop. We've got 70 million acres in the Conservation Stewardship Program, the largest conservation program, by acreage, at least, if not by dollars, that we've ever had. We have over three million acres in the Wetland Reserve Program. There's been over 8,000 beginning farmer down-payment loans. We've got cover crops suddenly going from something that we always cared about and talked about to something that much more conventional growers are now talking about, and soil health, which was always fundamental for our movement, is now becoming a talked-about thing. So lots of signs of progress. On the other hand, mid-scale agriculture, which we set about to try to save and promote and enhance, the numbers are not great. If you look at hog and dairy sector, I mean, over the course of time we've existed, the numbers have just gone down, down, down. In some ways there's just lots of things that have not been successful, but on the other hand, when we started we probably didn't talk a whole lot about local and regional food systems—now we talk about it all the time. It's a growing market. When we started beginning farmers were something that we worked on really hard, but the numbers were really low, and now the numbers are much better. They're not where they need to be, but the level of interest and the amount of opportunity is definitely growing. So it's definitely mixed, but I think we've accomplished a lot. So when Ron asked to send out some of those early minutes, and I dug through the files and found that set that he sent out from 1988, just reading through those again for the first time in a long, long time, things that struck me was how much continuity we've had, how much continuity in leadership and people, in committees, in the way we operate, in our vision, our message, our priorities—an awful lot of continuity, an awful lot of perseverance over that period of time. So the way I try to wrap it up for funders, often, and I think it's a good way to wrap up this little piece is that, you know, we've never been a huge organization by any means, if you look at budget and staffing, but we've had the magic of having this strong, grassroots presence, connected through really viable organizations on the ground and a small and dedicated staff in Washington. When we've put that all together, we've gotten tremendous, tremendous bang for the buck, and we've probably done more with less money than

most organizations that have worked in the food and ag space during that same period of time. So I think we have a lot to be proud of, and also, clearly, a lot to work on.

(20:42)

RK: Thank you, Ferd, that was just superb. I think it piqued a lot of us, our memories, ourselves, for comments I want to get from you all. I think about that statement about the continuity, part of the continuity is the rest of you around this table, so we want to hear from all of you. Later in the meeting we'll talk in a little more detail, a little more free-form conversation around the successes and the challenges and even failures, often, to get that on the record, and also to kind of prepare the way for further discussion about what happens next, and how do we build on the successes and take on the challenges in the future, both as organizations around the country, but also NSAC's role, and how NSAC can be an even more potent force in the future. But for now what I want to have happen is that we want to hear from each of you. I'd like each of you to talk for about five minutes or so about your own backgrounds, briefly, how you became interested in sustainable ag, particularly sustainable agricultural policy, how the groups you were working with back in the day when you became most involved with federal policy, what was happening on the landscape, and what were your concerns that led to the decision to really be involved in federal policy. Fred Kirschenmann has agreed to kick it off, and we'll kind of go around, back and forth, and hear from all of you over the next hour or so. Fred.

FK: My involvement with agriculture started when I was born. I was born, actually, in our farmhouse on our farm in North Dakota, and my father and mother started farming there in 1930 when they first got married, and that was still in the midst of the Dust Bowl. That experience was very formative for my father, because he understood that the Dust Bowl wasn't just about the weather, it was also about the way farmers farmed. So he was determined that that would never, ever happen go his farm again, so he became a big advocate of taking care of land, that was important. I can still remember him lecturing me when I was four years old about how important that was, and that kind of shaped a kind of core ethic, I guess, for me. And I was engaged in our farm—I started driving a tractor when I was seven and a combine when I was 12. And I thought probably that I would farm, but my father also was insistent that I get as much education as I could, so going to college was never up for debate. So off I went to college, and then got a scholarship and went off to graduate school, and finally earned a Ph.D., and then what was I going to do? Well, I started a career in higher education, and during that time as first a faculty member and then an administrator in higher education, I met a student by the name of David Vetter, and David Vetter was the individual who first introduced me to organic agriculture. The passion for him was what could happen to the quality of soil if you managed your soil appropriately as an organic system, and you returned your waste and all of that. That, then, intrigued me, and we started doing our garden organically, and then in 1976 my father had a mild heart attack, and we then decided to leave higher education and go back to our farm and convert it to an organic farm, which we did. I thought at that time—I didn't even know there was such a thing as an organic market. It was totally focused on how to manage your farm, and I didn't know that there were any other organic farmers in the region back in the late 1970s. And then it was, I think, two years after I moved back to the farm, there were three young entrepreneurs—and this is the important part of the story. In North Dakota there were three young entrepreneurs who had inherited some money, and they decided that there was going to be a market for organic

fertilizer, so they thought they would start an organic fertilizer company. They somehow had the names of a lot of farmers who were farming organically in that northern plains region. So they organized a conference at a hotel in Bismarck, North Dakota, invited all of us to come. One of the things they did was they asked the farmers to tell their stories. This was the first time that I was in a meeting with all of these farmers who were telling their stories about how to farm organically and what that meant. And during lunch I was sitting around a table with a group of those farmers and also one of those three young people that had organized the conference. We were all saying—this is so important to have these conversations with each other. We didn't even know that this was even a possibility. We've got to figure out some way to keep this going. So this young guy said—we have a room upstairs, and if any of you want, if you'd like to get together and talk about that, about how you could do that, that would be great. So we said—yeah, that would be great. So then he announced at the end of lunch that we were going to have this meeting. So we thought if five or six people show up to have that conversation, that would be great. Thirty people showed up. At that meeting, within an hour, each of us took certain kinds of responsibilities of how we should do that and make that happen. How do you organize a non-profit organization, and what we need to do, etc. And then the following March we had our first meeting. If I remember I think there were 50 people showed up to that first meeting. It was then that we organized what we first called the North Dakota Natural Farmers Association. That became the ongoing group of us, and the thing that's important about this for me is that in my experience at least, ultimately what makes these things happen is the sense of community and people working together and learning from each other about how to move things forward. And that, then, grew, that organization, within a couple of years grew—there were not only North Dakota farmers but South Dakota, some from Minnesota, some from Nebraska, even some from Canada, so we changed the name to the Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society, because the term “sustainable” then became important. And, of course, that organization is still operating. I don't think as an organization that we have been heavily engaged in terms of national policy; we've always been more focused on what works in our own region and how we could make things happen in our own regions. But certainly our awareness of NSAC and its importance and supporting it in various ways has been true ever since then. There have been some individual leaders, also, within the organization that have been critical. Theresa Podoll, for example, who was one of its first executive directors, did an amazing job of focusing the organization and moving it forward. Terry and Janet Jacobson have been very engaged in it. So there were a number of individuals that I could go on and name. But to me that's one example of things happening from the bottom up at the grassroots level, because people recognize the importance of community, of engaging each other, of working with each other in order to move forward for the common good. It was never about how we each, individually, could be successful. It was how we could become part of that common good which would benefit all of us.

(28:29)

RK: Thank you, Fred, that's very good. What you were saying at the end made me think about something that maybe will come up in more detail, but what always struck me, and even going back and reading some of these notes, was the fact that one of the deepest fundamentals that's all a part of NSAC is the democratic process, a really deep commitment to it. And we remember some of those meetings where you think—oh, man, this democracy isn't all it's cracked up to be! [All laugh] It's just so difficult to do it, but it's got to be done that way if you're going to be

successful in the long run and have people really engaged. And the way you helped make that happen, Fred, has been really important, as an example with the Northern Plains group. Well, I'd like to hear next from Duane Havorka.

DH: I grew up a city kid in Lincoln Nebraska, but my parents were both farm kids, so my dad grew up on a farm in southeast South Dakota, around Tyndall and Tabor, and his family still farms up there. He worked for the Soil Conservation Service, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, for a lot of years. My mom grew up on a farm in Palisade, Nebraska, out in southwest Nebraska, and my grandfather actually had one of the first water rights on the Frenchman Canal. So it sort of introduced me early to farms, and spent time on farms in summers and holidays and things. So I kind of got into organic gardening early, but it was really, I think it was about 1992, when I volunteered for the Nebraska Wildlife Federation Public Policy Committee, and then joined the board not long after that. When I started getting into wildlife in natural resource policy in Nebraska, and not long after that Chuck Hassebrook and the folks from the Center invited me up to a gathering they were having and conservation groups and others to talk about kind of those linkages between agriculture and wildlife and kind of introduced me to the whole sustainable agriculture stuff and organization. If you look at Nebraska and you start looking at a landscape level, it's less than two percent public land, so if we're going to save wildlife and have wildlife in Nebraska, you can't just look to parks and natural areas, you've really got to go to the 95 percent of the state which is farms and ranches. If you're going to have wildlife there, you've got to look to what's the biggest impact on those day-to-day decisions, and those are really the farm bill decisions. So there were farm bill conservation programs, the commodity programs, insurance programs. What was really driving wildlife decisions on the land that made a difference for wildlife in Nebraska, it was that federal ag policy. And that became very clear. Even at the time there was probably over a hundred million dollars a year that was coming into the state for USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) conservation and other programs, and that dwarfed what our state game and parks commission was spending. However you diced it, if you cared about wildlife in Nebraska, you had to look at those public lands, and so you had to look at federal policy, because that's what was driving those day-to-day decisions. So we made the decision early as an organization at that time, and I was kind of the guy who was leading the charge, so I got to go to join the Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, so we've been long-time members there, and it's always been just a terrific opportunity to learn about this stuff and to engage in the discussions to get a better understanding. So over the years we, at Nebraska Wildlife Federation, were the state affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation, and at the time there was not much of an ag policy program at NWF, but we and some other affiliates in South Dakota and the Dakotas and Kansas and Iowa who were recognizing how important this was, kind of dragged NWF into the fray, and now they've got a pretty active policy program that they developed over the years. So I think that's what got me started and got me involved and kept me going. And I think that Fred mentioned the sense of community with the people that were in those meetings. It was a commitment of people who were trying to do the right thing. And the great thing was some of them even were doing the right thing on the land. I mean, it wasn't a bunch of policy wonks like me sitting around dreaming up ideas, it was farmers and ranchers and people who worked directly with farmers and ranchers who were talking about what's going to make a difference and what's going to really make a change. So that was, I think, part of what's kept me interested and excited and part of the movement.

(33:30)

RK: Thank you, Duane. You touched on something that I've been grateful about with you over the years, and it's the fact that over time there's been various relationships with the national conservation, national environmental organizations. And there's been some difficulties in some of those and with different priorities and things like that, but keeping you involved and bringing in the National Wildlife Federation has been really important to this effort, and has helped make them a leader and a real ally, for the most part, on all these struggles, so that's been very important to the movement. So, thank you. Ann?

AR: At the time that I got involved in SAWG, I was the national agricultural specialist for the Izaak Walton League of America. That organization was concerned with many of the same types of policies that Duane discusses in terms of our priorities were wildlife, water, and soil, really. Those concerns have been with me for a long time since growing up on a farm in Missouri, a Century Farm, growing up as the kid of, especially, a father who was a strong conservationist, whose interests, especially, revolved around wildlife, and his love of hunting, actually. So that had a big influence on me, but growing up on a farm and all the hard work, I had no interest, actually, in continuing to be involved in agriculture when I went to undergraduate school, until I started getting involved, unexpectedly, in environmental issues there, and reading Wendell Berry's *Unsettling of America* and some other writings, certainly, realized how, by working on agriculture, which is where I came from, and the kind of rural communities that I came from and generations of my family came from, that I could affect wildlife and water and air and energy. So I started getting involved in those issues and in helping lead an organic study group at the University of Missouri, and then similarly involved in activities at the University of Wisconsin in grad school, and got the opportunity to work for the Izaak Walton League as I left graduate school and moved to Minnesota, where somehow I had the good fortune of being recruited by Ron Kroese of the Land Stewardship Project to become a board member of LSP. I think that's one of the ways that I came to SAWG, probably. That experience over the years, in large part, for me revolved around the conservation committee, and I was one of the first leaders of the SAWG Conservation Committee that became the NSAC Conservation Committee. I was in that position for a decade, so I really got to see quite a bit of the early discussion and priority setting to be deeply involved in it and be learning from it, learning so much. It was a wonderful opportunity to work with smart, dedicated and caring colleagues who were such good listeners and so respectful of everybody in the room, and as we tried to work for more enlightened, progressive, balanced positions for rural America that could have so many benefits for producers, but, certainly, also for the soil, water, and wildlife that were the priorities on my job description. I loved working with everyone, and especially valued the opportunities to help find common ground with producers, farmers who participated. One of the highlights of my involvement with SAWG and NSAC was putting together a working group of a lot of different people who came from many different angles to work on wetlands policy, and we came out with a position paper. I believe Fred Kirschenmann was one of the people who was involved in that, and Terry Jacobson from Northern Plains and a number of others, too. We came out with a position paper that got quite a bit of interest around the country. It was certainly timely, and I believe that it really helped set the stage for the Wetlands Reserve Program that I got to work on later in various ways, even after leaving the Izaak Walton League. Seeing what we were able to accomplish, even now and then, helped me through the years believe that you should really go

for it, and it's fine to tilt at windmills, because now and then you really can have an impact. And also, it's always been an antidote for me to cynicism that I hear around me, because some of the things that we did would not have seemed at all possible with a small staff and just the challenges and the odds against us. But if you just took an issue forward and started talking to people about it, even as crazy as they might think that it was in the beginning, pretty soon, with Ferd's help, you could see it turning into national legislation. It's been amazing, and I believe our work really has made a difference. But working on progressive policy, as has been alluded to, is a never-ending process, and I'm thankful for the long-term commitment and energy of so many including, especially, Ferd, who continues to tilt at those windmills and make it possible for some of the kinds of policies and programs that then I worked on after leaving the Izaak Walton League and leaving involvement with Sustainable Ag Coalition, in terms of wetlands and water quality and watersheds and local foods, and now crop insurance program reform, through the whole farm revenue protection program. So I feel very lucky to have had the opportunity to be involved in the Sustainable Ag Working Group and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, and I want to say thank you to all of you.

(40:54)

RK: Thank you, Ann—and speaking of tilting at windmills, I believe you're also now involved in the herculean task of taking on Iowa's rivers, right? With the Iowa Rivers Revival—you've been involved in that process, and we've heard a lot about the condition of waters in our big ag states, and especially Iowa, so I just wanted to make note of that. I don't know if you have anything to say about it, but important work goes on.

AR: Yeah, thanks.

RK: Now we'll hear from Theresa, Practical Farmers and other things.

TO: To state the obvious, I'm always surprised at how many people don't understand how important policy is to what happens on our landscape, and what hard work it is to get that policy. Over and over again, people just kind of assume there's going to be funding for sustainable ag programs. Even people who work on those programs don't understand what it takes to get there. I joined the Midwest Sustainable Ag Working Group as the director in the early 2000s. The first meeting I went to was in East Troy, Wisconsin, and it was really exciting to see the people come in from all over, greet each other, sit down, get acquainted again. I thought it was really exciting to see the democratic process in action. So everyone goes around the room, talks about what they're up to, and then it's time for Ferd Hoefner to give his Washington report. He gets up—he's barefoot, pretty casual (Everyone chuckles), and I was astounded. I just couldn't believe how knowledgeable, well-spoken, charismatic he was, and I've been even more impressed with him over the years since then. He's just a wonderful, wonderful person. MSAWG and what has now become NSAC is really one of the most effective coalitions I've seen, and that's because of this Washington presence with very knowledgeable people and the strong grassroots constituency. There's always some ground truthing of what the policies are going to be with those working on the ground. I went from what was then MSAWG to lead Practical Farmers of Iowa, and that's a group with a very widespread grassroots constituency. I've seen through the years how much our farmers have benefitted from the programs that NSAC has worked on. For

example we have had a lot of SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) grants throughout the years that have really helped us do a lot of on-farm research and demonstration—less so in recent years with SARE. But EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives program)—EQIP has been just absolutely huge for our farmers to get cost share, to do good practices, and same with the Conservation Stewardship Program as well. So it's really been a wonderful example of how people can come together and really accomplish various policy changes, and I've been thrilled to be a part of it.

RK: Practical Farmers is a really good example of that ground truthing. I think more and more ground is being truthed as a process all over Iowa. As a native Iowan myself, I'm really grateful for that. I think you said you have something like 3,000 members right now?

TO: Just under 3,000.

RK: And most of them are farming in some way, are they not?

TO: Three-fourths are. It's really good.

(45:00)

RK: So that's very impressive. Thank you. Well, now we're going to go to the other side of the room, and another part of the country. A lot of our discussion is coming out of the early days of the Midwest SAWG, but here we have a representative of ongoing, long-term work, more in the southern part of the United States. [Calls on Michael Sligh]

MS: Right. There were many streams that fed into this national effort, and in the South it was a different set of issues that really drove us toward federal policy. I come from a long line of family farmers and ranchers in West Texas. My dad and uncles all went off to the war and came back and went to the GI Bill and became into modern agriculture, and I remember the debates between my grandfather and my uncles over the question of the future of farming. Should we use all these pesticides? Should we get big or get out? What's the direction? I ended up siding with my grandfather, because he had survived the Dust Bowl and had had a very diversified farm, and so when I thought I'd go into farming, I wanted to farm a different way. My generation of farmers were struck by *Silent Spring* and concerns of pesticides, and we wanted to farm a different way. We didn't really know how to do that except through finding other people, like Fred said, who maybe were a little further along the curve. But as hard as farming was, it seemed to us as the drumbeat got bigger and bigger around kind of the Butz policy of get big or get out, and if you weren't making money you needed to get a bigger truck, many of us kind of got involved in the American Ag Movement and look at those issues and think, well, maybe there's a problem with the policies. It was kind of like what we called back home—they were just plain ass-backwards. We rewarded farmers to do the wrong things and we penalized them for trying to do the right things. And so about that time the farm crisis started to really peak, and so I decided I would take a little sabbatical from farming and just go fix that problem, (All laugh) and I'd get right back to farming. I thought it would just be, you know, not that difficult. So I looked around and I decided to join the Rural Advancement Foundation, because they had a long track record back to the Great Depression, and worked with sharecroppers in trying to pull agriculture out of

the last Great Depression, so I thought that was a good place to go work, and I was going to go work on seeds and organic and all these positive initiatives, and my first assignment was to go and organize a tri-racial farmers organization and hot-lines to prevent suicide of farmers in the farm crisis. So that was a fair amount of work across the country, a massive amount of farming, farmers going out, very much like the recent housing bubble. But worse, because you weren't just losing your home, you were losing your way of life and everybody on your farm was losing their way of life. It was a massive undertaking, nationally, and so there was a great deal of organizing, and we were involved in the Save the Family Farm Coalition. That was the thread that brought us into federal policy, and we were wanting to create an environment where farmers could have access to fair credit and they could have fair prices, and we could address the environmental issues by putting that package together. We had worked with Weaver out in Oregon on an organic bill in 1984 that went nowhere, but he had a young staffer named DeFazio, who later turned out to be a pretty good ally. I think I met Ferd during that time. And we also worked on the '85 Farm Bill, trying to get the Credit Act passed, trying to get the Family Farm Act passed, and also LISA. We were trying to get funding for sustainable agriculture and research in that farm bill. So I think that's where our thread came into this, was trying to address these issues of justice and of fairness and realizing that you could have the right practice and you could even develop customer demand, but if you had the wrong policies, you were not going to be able to change the paradigm, so that it really took all three, and they have to kind of come together in a synergistic way if you're going to shift. That was the opportunity we had with the Organic Foods Production Act, is being to have consumer demand and put some policies that were encouraging it with farmers who had the right practices. So we have been a part of creating Southern SAWG for the same reason that Chuck and others had created the Midwest SAWG. We thought, well, hell, Chuck can't just have something in the Midwest, we've got to have something in the South, and it was isolation in the South that really drove us to create that southern coalition, because, like Fred was saying, farmers were out there and they knew no one else that was doing it. They were alone, they were trying to reinvent the wheel on their own, and we said—well, can't we put all these people together and accelerate change? And then it became clear that having a southern thing was not enough, we needed to bond with the Midwest and the Northeast, and we had to build a bigger coalition if we were to turn this ship around. So that's taken a lot longer than I thought. It turned out it's a lot more like watching a tractor rust to change federal policy [All laugh] then fixing it, but I think, as Ferd has eloquently said, if we stay the course, we can really make a difference, and I do agree that the bigger looming issues of structure and competition and restoring the democracy is a lot about where our work has to go.

(51:17)

RK: Thank you very much. We really appreciate the perspective, and more especially appreciate the fact that while you have gone back to the farm somewhat, this break you were taking, it's continued to extend, [All laugh] and we hope it continues quite a while longer. Thank you. Duane?

DS: Thank you. We're asked for some personal background—I started my career in soil and water conservation about 40 years ago, and I was employed at the Soil Conservation Service for seven years during the 1970s. I enjoyed the work immensely, but, frankly, I watched an incredible amount of backsliding as far as soil conservation, water protection, and wildlife

habitat. The export years of the '70s and the high commodity prices did incredible damage. So I had great hope for what the federal government could do during the Carter years, and when Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980, took him at his word that government was the problem, and he was not going to help government do much of anything, and I started looking for other ways to use my talent, and I decided that private sector initiative might be a better use of my time. So I approached a new organization in Iowa, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. It's a statewide land trust, and at the time I approached them they had a grand total of four employees and were wondering from month-to-month whether they would meet payroll. I presented to their executive the grand idea that since you do not have a soil and water program, and I want to do soil and water in the private sector, I'll raise all my own money from private foundations if I can be affiliated with you. He referred to that as a deal he could not refuse. So I've been there ever since. As far as when we became involved in federal policy, as a statewide land trust, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation was not advocating to its members that we were a public policy organization at all, and the original founders really didn't intend for it to be. But we rolled into the farm credit crisis of the mid-'80s, and my assessment of Ronald Reagan was wrong from a standpoint of his ideology screwed up the federal production control program so bad that we were in a farm credit crisis, where there was a bottomless market as far as the price of land, and it was taking banks under as well as taking farmers under. At that point our trustees decided that there was some conservation messages that need to come out of the vast emergency intervention that the federal government was going to have to do. So we started giving testimony in '83 about the need for a long-term conservation reserve program involving up to 40 million acres. And that idea took hold; we lobbied lobbyists in Washington, DC, to get them on board. Most of the national environmental groups were not paying attention to farm policy prior to the '85 farm bill, and a small group of environmental groups had an immense impact in the '85 Farm Bill. We worked with the Iowa delegation and was able to get conservation easement language put into the Farmers Home Administration that farmers could trade a conservation easement for debt forgiveness if the federal government held the mortgage on their land, and lands that went into federal ownership because of default on loans, that easements, putting appropriate land use on those farms permanently before they were sold on the market, that piece of legislation was also approved. So it was the farm credit crisis that really brought Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation into the policy arena. As far as why we became involved with Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group at that time—it was about 1987, I believe, when you and Marty Strange convened your first meeting, asking groups that had been involved in policy in '85 whether we should create some capacity in preparation for the next event. And, frankly, it was a no-brainer from our experience, and the reason it's a no-brainer, and I'll share it for whoever hears this in the future—one was we became involved at the last minute. We had no advance relationships with anyone in Washington, including our own congressional delegation. We were trying to work on policy with no permanent presence on the Hill to even track what was going on. We received pro bono prices from a Connecticut Avenue lobbyist firm and still wrote big checks in order to succeed with what we did in the '85 Farm Bill. And frankly, we were just very lucky. This was a time when we had a Democrat congressman, Berkley Bedell, from northwest Iowa on the House Ag Committee, and Republican Cooper Evans from eastern Iowa on the House ag committee, and at that point the fact that you had bi-partisan support from two committee members was often enough to get legislation passed. So many of our successes I think was more dumb luck than anything else. I'll just wrap this up from a standpoint of during the 30 years I've been involved in dabbling in policy—because often policy was not my primary job

during that period—most of the states in the Midwest that have been active in this, we've lost members of Congress. The population growth has happened elsewhere; the rural influence, the ag influence is declining. And I'm thrilled that the evolution of the National Sustainable Ag Coalition is as broad and as diverse as it has become, because that's truly what it's going to take to be successful. I'm very proud of the conservation initiatives, and I have to say that Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation really only worked on conservation initiatives. For most of the years we were a participating member and not represented, but I'm very proud of a very long list of conservation accomplishments, but what's still missing here in the work ahead of us is I don't think we've successfully mitigated the damages of ag subsidies. It's still ag subsidies that define the future of soil and water and wildlife in Iowa, and so for our mission of protecting and restoring Iowa's resources, there's no way we can possibly accomplish the mission without being involved in a successful coalition.

(59:01)

RK: Thank you, Duane. Appreciate your comments and your role over the years. As you were talking about 1980 or when Reagan came in, I can remember ... I think the National Ag Lands Study came out around '79, didn't that? Bob Gray worked on it? Does that sound about right? Anyway, I can remember that startling statistic that for every bushel of corn produced in Iowa we lost two bushels of soil, and that was such an amazing thing to hear. We know that that sort of thing just couldn't be kept up, as rich and wonderful as Iowa soils are. It was also a real motivator for me, and I know it was for you, too. Let's hear from Chuck Hasebrook.

CH: Well, I cut my teeth on family farm issues. I grew up on a modest-size family farm in northeast Nebraska, sitting around the kitchen table talking about smaller farmers being pushed out. I remember one summer my brother had come home from college, and he brought home a report entitled, "Who Will Sit Up With the Corporate Sow?" about the growth in corporate hog production, from the Center for Rural Affairs, and a year or two later I was working at the Center, first as a VISTA volunteer, and later on staff. Most of my early work focused on family farm issues. I particularly worked, as we looked at growing corporate hog production and just the loss of family farms generally, we saw one of the key drivers being tax subsidies, tax policies that essentially, through tax incentives, subsidized corporate agriculture and subsidized very large operations to push out family-sized farms. So I went to work on that. I worked closely with groups like, got state pork producer associations on our side and commodity groups and some Farm Bureaus on our side, and we pushed through some important changes on that in the 1986 tax reform that then President Reagan initiated. And after we got done with that, I looked around, I saw the advent of biotechnology, and thought that that was really going to be a powerful force shaping agriculture, shaping technology, and I wanted to work on how we could shape the direction of biotechnology so that it actually supported family farms and good environmental stewardship. Of course, that was a controversial stand. It meant a lot of groups that supported sustainable agriculture, many just were against biotechnology. I felt we had to take the bull by the horns and move it in the right direction. Anyway, as part of doing a report analyzing that whole issue, I'd organized a meeting of folks in sustainable agriculture, in family farm groups in Omaha, to talk about what's the positive research agenda, whether it's biotechnology or other fields. What are the kinds of research that really need to be done if we really want to strengthen family farming? What drew me into sustainable agriculture was not only was it good for land,

but also it was driving research in directions that developed new knowledge, that enabled farmers to use more of their management in the field and in the farm to capture a bigger share of the farm profit, by cutting input costs, by improving production. Whereas technology had been moving in the opposite direction, by helping companies sell more expensive inputs to farmers, and farmers' share of profits shrinking. So we pulled together this meeting and talked about research needs that would strengthen family farming. I remember at the end of that Ron Kroese said—well, you know, we ought to have another meeting just to talk about how we can reform commodity programs, because commodity programs are really penalizing farmers involved in more sustainable approaches to agriculture. So we did that, and it evolved into the Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group and the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. And I would say that, as we organized that, we really stood on the shoulders of a lot of people who built the sustainable agriculture movement before it ever got into the policy arena. Fred Kirschenmann is one of them, Marty Strange is another. Wes Jackson, Dick Thompson, Dave Vetter—you could go on with the list of names. There was sort of this emerging sustainable agriculture movement out there that hadn't really touched federal policy directly, and we really stood on their shoulders and built on that. I think one of the most important decisions that was made early-on revolved around this idea that Ferd alluded to of having a coalition of groups that were formally represented, and then having a broader network of groups. One of Ron Kroese's points was that the coalition ought to be a coalition that only consisted of groups that worked directly with farmers, and I thought that was really important. And so when we got to Washington and started having impact on the discussions over the 1990 Farm Bill, there was enormous resistance, I would say, a certain feeling of being threatened by certain Washington, DC environmental interests that really didn't like us coming in and sort of taking part of the influence that they felt should be rightfully theirs. So this idea of having a group of upstart farmers and farm-related groups coming into Washington on their turf was a real threat to some of those groups. Going through the '90 Farm Bill, I thought we just really had to get more strength if we were going to have an impact going forward, so I kind of set out with the idea of building this national group. And at the same time that I'd come to that conclusion, started putting feelers out about how we could build a national group, then people like Michael were starting the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, and other folks in different parts of the country. And so it just kind of grew into that then. And the rest is history. I remember over the years, looking back on it, I thought, you know, regardless of what we won or lost—and we had our wins and we had our losses—one of the most important things that came out of that was that we created a permanent presence for sustainable farmers and sustainable agriculture in public policy debates, and that was important.

(1:05:39)

RK: Very important. Thank you, Chuck. I think all of us agree that—I think everyone shares, I should say, my total belief and understanding of the very important role the Center for Rural Affairs has played in this all along. I don't think I would have been able to get the Land Stewardship Project going without the guidance of Chuck and Marty and people like that. So, we're very grateful and glad it continues to today. Thanks. All right—Amy.

AL: So, my work, really, goes back to a passion for social justice, and I've been, since the late '70s and through the early '80s, I was very active in social change. I was extremely drawn to

diverse groups working together, and I got hired onto the national staff of Citizen Action and worked on building coalitions on issue campaigns. We worked on the Clean Water Act. We worked on the Superfund. We worked on the Shell Boycott and apartheid. My mentor was Heather Booth. I had done a little bit with her on the ERA. We worked on housing issues, racial justice, labor issues. I was employed by the Citizen Labor Energy Coalition. We were fighting Big Oil. I specifically had the work of training people in grassroots organizing and coalition building around the country, most in the northeast, but I was on the national staff. There were many, many issues that we had worked on, and people always saying—you won't win—and we won, we won a lot of issues. And I got to a point in my life where in my heart I wanted to work on farming issues. There was always a big joke that I was reading Rodale or Wendell Berry, and everybody else was so into the urban issues. So when it was time for me to move on, I somehow got hired to work with the National Dialogue for Sustainable Agriculture under the direction of the National Sustainable Coordinating Council. I remember getting hired and Chuck said to me—our problem is we need more power; there's just a few of us working on this. So we set out with the Dialogue and we had a little bit of money, and we held over a hundred dialogues around the country, bringing diverse interests to the table. It was mostly farmers and environmentalists, and rural folks. But we tried to bring more fringe-er, elements to the table. We did very well out of that infusion of discussion around policy, really lifted up the SAWGs, and it was a great thing for the SAWGs to get a little bit of money to hold these meetings to talk about farming and the environment, and what the impact is on the culture, and raise some consciousness. I remember so clearly a lot of the feedback from the dialogues was—well, we know now, in developing a consciousness, that farmers are stewards. And that was huge. There were so many myths out there that we had to bust. The whole thing about farmers not being stewards and environmentalists not being friendly to farmers, and more of that kind of thing. So the dialogues developed under the great leadership of our issue committees' policy options. What would we like to see in policy? And at that time there was a little bit of a split between—are we doing this policy for a reason or are we just learning and building consciousness. I kept coming back to Chuck saying—we need more power—and also having my growth and development in advocacy and trying to win, and, like, being an activist. I just took the thing and said—we're going to campaign for this on the farm bill. And there were people who dropped out at that time. It was a big challenge to get a lot of these fantastic groups to want to do policy. So I remember going all over the country to little groups and groups of groups and the SAWGs, and saying—this is your campaign—you have to make it happen. And so I did a lot of that, in addition to a lot of outreach. That was a very big thing. We reached out to co-ops; we reached out to environmental groups that didn't do anything in agriculture; we got social change groups involved. A lot of the social justice groups that I had worked with, I was working to get them on board, and we brought in a lot of the urban elements, because so much of the sustainable ag work that was being done was in the rural areas where farming was so big. So getting a lot of that urban element was really important. I remember a time when the Community Food Security Coalition was starting to pull together, and they were very focused on urban people. That was more about people and food. We had to get them into the tent. If we were going to build power, we had to build a big tent. I think we may have gone a little too far—it became a little chaotic and too big to manage. But what happened from that was we did build a much broader consciousness in the general public. We built a broader consciousness among single issue groups to take on the importance of farming and food and how do we sustain our local, our regional, our national, and our planetary future? As messy as it was, it did build a lot of consciousness and a lot of activism, and it built the

SAWGs. As everybody said, the SAWGs are still here. Some of them are still working in many different ways, not just on policy, to change the food system. Later we can talk about some of those examples. So I moved on to continue working in social change, worked on a lot of elections and came back to the Northeast SAWG. Eventually the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture merged with the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, which was MSAWG's advocacy arm, and just to step back a minute, when we were doing the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture, Ferd and I were great partners—we've got to have that Washington presence as well as the grassroots in coalition building. So that partnership really was the center. We had depth through our issue committees developing really deep policy writing on initiatives, and the campaign provided that breadth that built the power, so we could have many more contacts on those people making decisions on farm policy. So eventually the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture and the Sustainable Ag Coalition merged to become NSAC.

(1:15:15)

RK: Thank you, Amy. Yeah, I remember by that time I was working more in the philanthropy side of this picture, and I remember the difficulties of getting the campaign and the sustainable ag coalition together. People wanted it to happen, but all of that democracy, all those different groups trying to figure out how to put it together, and it's a real tribute to the depth of your friendship and your patience that that was able to happen. And also, the whole thing of I think we will want to obviously keep these efforts grounded in people working the land, but the need for that broader constituency, we can talk more about that when we talk about the future, but that's obviously going to be key in that power building, and even like the benefitting of the states like Iowa, then, that have lost representation in Washington, but they need the support of that broader country if we're going to really have success in Iowa, in the rural states. So it's a very good point you made; I appreciate it. Mary—tell us about Kansas.

MF: The benefit of being one of the later interviews is that I find I can say ditto to almost a piece of what everybody has said, so it's really humbling and inspiring, both. My personal story parallels sort of the emergence of the three organizations in Kansas that are the sustainable ag groups, and that's the Kansas Organic Producers, the Kansas Rural Center, and, of course, the Land Institute, which is the most influential and the biggest player, I would say. My personal story is I grew up on a small farm, never more than four or five hundred acres in size. It was a very traditional farm. We had a very small, 20-cow, Grade-B dairy. We had probably 10 or 12 sows. We'd sell feeder pigs a couple times a year. My father grew alfalfa and clover. He rotated crops. It was the quintessential diversified operation. He did not use chemicals. He never made that move to pesticides. He did start using a little synthetic fertilizer. So he was known as sort of a Luddite. So I think I've joked that my interest in organic farming and sustainable agriculture was genetic, because it just sort of was natural to me that we didn't do those things. Graduated college in 1976. I had a bachelor's in English, but my real education probably came with my job that supported me, was working in a university library, and that was back with the Dewey Decimal System, and things were organized very different. We had a science and technology floor, and I was checking in the periodicals, everything from *Advertising Age* to *Women's Wear Daily*, and all of the scientific journals in between, including *Organic Farming*, right in the middle. So I was educating myself by gleaning everything I could from some of the science

journals. I think Ferd mentioned the world food crisis, and so there were a lot of things on population and hunger and food production, and then, of course, there was the *Organic Gardening*, and I was always an avid gardener, even as a kid. My husband was getting a degree in philosophy. We were perfectly situated to go back to farming with those two degrees. Everything sort of was coming together in the late '70s. We discovered Kansas Organic Producers, which started in 1976, from a flier at our local food co-op where when we were living in Lawrence. It was the announcement of an annual meeting, and like Fred talked about in North Dakota, there was this gathering. We found our tribe. Here were all the people that were like-minded and were basically coming together as a social support group, sharing information and learning what worked on their farms and not working in policy, though. We dabbled a little with state certification, but that didn't go anywhere, due to a lot of resistance from conventional ag. The Kansas Rural Center actually was a spin-off of Kansas Organic Producers, because, like a lot of other organic organizations, the O-word scared a lot of people, and we thought we needed an organization that could address the broader policy issues. Late '70s we were dealing with, I believe, the Arab oil embargo and high energy costs, and a lot of interest and concern about cost of inputs and the rising cost of inputs and energy on farms. The rural center actually visited the Center for Rural Affairs, the steering committee—that was ... again, names: Jim Lukens from Southern SAWG eventually—he started out as a Kansas farm boy and was on our steering committee. So we set ourselves up, sort of a sister organization to the Center for Rural Affairs. We decided to move back to the farm. My father died, and we had slowly sort of been taking over more and more responsibilities there, and decided, well, we would get jobs and farm. I was working for a community action program which—Amy mentioned social justice issues—I'd always been intrigued by Johnson's War on Poverty, and that documentary that CBS did years before, so this seemed right, but it was also another education in economic inequities in a rural area that was so rich with resources and production. Something didn't balance; something wasn't right. I was approached by the steering committee—come to work for us; we don't have any money, but you can come work for us. Like others, I had started out as a VISTA volunteer. I wasn't doing organizing work, but I was ... my first project was to research land and water rights ownership in southwest Kansas, and that came right off of *Wheels of Fortune* at the Center for Rural Affairs, the study on irrigation agriculture, and *Who is Going to Sit Up With the Corporate Sow*. In fact, I had an internship with the Center for Rural Affairs to finish that work. I think the Rural Center's involvement in policy issues sort of really came to a head or started with the farm crisis. We were sort of the default organization that everybody started calling. At that time my husband was working for Kansas Legal Services as a paralegal, and he was getting calls from farmers about foreclosures and problems with lenders. We started working with Gene Severance at the Center for Rural Affairs, because he was doing a lot of work on credit issues, so we really launched into not only federal but the state policy on credit issues and some of the things that were happening to farmers at that time. We've always had a two-pronged approach, and it's varied over time, which is stronger, but the practical on-farm information—we work a lot with farmers on adopting the practices that they needed to reduce their reliance on chemicals and input suppliers. The farm crisis actually sort of jump-started all of that, because we still work with farmers who are in farming today because they changed their farming practices. The other aspect, of course, was policy, becoming involved with the ... I think we were one of the initial 12 states in MSAWG, and continuing through the years. I think I agree with Michael that the structure and competition issues are the hardest, but they are probably, ultimately, the most critical, and it's sometimes difficult to get some of that across to the new generation coming in.

They think that local food is going to solve all our problems, and it is not. We are still very much in a capitalist economy, and it rules the whole show, and how you change that to an economy that works more for people is really the huge challenge. My husband, I talked to him to explain to him what we were going to talk about today, and what the future issues were, and he said—well, just tell them that we are at the end of the beginning, which means that we are at a new beginning, so I'll close with that.

(1:25:15)

RK: Thank you, Mary. I think a number of us will be talking about that more in the sessions coming up, about this as we look at some successes, but going forward, about the structure issues, and how do we make those relevant, and make effective change in that area. It will be really interesting to discuss that. It's almost baffling to me, actually. I want to learn from you all about it, because it's a really big issue. But last but not least, by any means ... oh, excuse me, I've got ...

MF: We won't ask him which one he thought was last. [All chuckle]

RK: You guys threw me off by the way we were going back and forth—sorry, that was me. Francis first, and then we'll do Margaret.

FT: Well, I've been more peripherally involved in policy than most of you. I grew up on a dairy farm in Minnesota, and I went to college and got a degree in music and philosophy, and actually I went to graduate school in trumpet performance, and I realized I wasn't going to be Doc Severinsen [All laugh], so I came back and farmed. So on the home farm for nine years. In '75 and '76 we converted the farm to organic. I kind of instigated it, but we struggled for years. We read the Rodale publications and all, and we kind of reinvented our own wheel, but we got going pretty good, and by about 1980 I wanted to go back to graduate school, so I signed up to study soil science. Like Michael, I wanted to tell them how to do it, you know. I found out real quick at the land grant universities you keep quiet about organic farming. One of my professors, I told him about it one day for about five minutes, and he listened and then he said—well, it depends upon how far back in the horse and buggy era you want to go. Well, I never talked about it again. [All laugh] So when I finished grad school I fortunately landed in the position at USDA in Washington as a national program leader for soil science. Usually they took department heads from land grant universities, but they got tired of these old guys coming to retire, so they took someone new on. It was very interesting; it was in 1988, just the same time you guys were all getting going, and along the way I kind of heard about this guy, Ferd Hoefner, and I looked him up, and I found in him some kindred spirits, and I think I met Ann then, too. We had the Environmental and Energy Working Group, wasn't it, met once a month in the Capitol?

AR: Oh, right, right.

FT: So I began to find, pairing off some people who had common interests. It was interesting—back then, you know, even sustainable agriculture was a heretic kind of thing. The people in USDA who were working on LISA and so on were really off the reservation, and you really didn't want to talk about it. My colleagues at USDA never knew I had been an organic farmer all

that while. [All chuckle] About in 1992 I came back farming in Iowa. I wanted to get back to farming. It's interesting that between '92 and 2002 I was farming. I came back—Ferd asked me to come and talk at a Senate ag hearing. I talked to my colleagues at USDA, my old colleagues, and they said—give a seminar. So 10 years later I came back and I gave a seminar, a slide show of my organic farm and the whole thing. I couldn't believe the difference, in 10 years how they had transformed, and they were all excited about what I was doing, local foods and organic and so to see that change, back in 1982 when I started graduate school and you couldn't even say organic, to in the early 2000s where things were changing. So it's pretty exciting. And now when I look at the news and I see some ag things going on, and I see Senator Grassley quoted, and I see Ferd Hoefner quoted on equal status, and it's pretty exciting to see that. So I think we're making progress.

1:29:18)

RK: Certainly are. I know that you've played an important role in the Practical Farmers of Iowa, too, and from what I've been able to tell, it's been really good. So that's been great. Thank you. So now, we really will get to Margaret.

MK: So I, too, was a city girl. I was raised in Norfolk, Virginia, and I went not to the land grant university—I went to the University of Virginia, got an English major. If you're an English major, people think you're going to do something with the law, and I went to Washington, DC, and I got a position with the National Legal Aid and Defender Association. The position was one of those starting positions, very administrative, probably very glorified secretary. It wasn't called that, but it was heavily on that support end, but I did make a condition of my employment be that I get trained to be a lobbyist. It was called the Access to Justice Project. And it was a really great project and did a lot of good work, and I happened to get a chance to witness the transition when I started in '79 through the Carter years into the Reagan years, and it was a startling transition, and certainly cemented my politics, which were already pretty clear. But I became really clear that I didn't want to be in Washington, and that there was a lot of derivative talk and style and posturing that was just going to be anathema for me. I think I was a very good lobbyist. I think people thought I was a good lobbyist, but I thought, boy, as a life, this isn't going to work. And I did one of those workshops—What Color is Your Parachute?—kind of who do I want to be when I grow up kinds of workshops. And it became clear to everybody in the workshop and me—and, you know, people give you recommendations, and mine, it was clear I wanted to do natural resources work in the Third World. I had taken every botany course I humanly could when I was at UBA, every itinerant botany professor I grabbed them, and such. So it was clear that was where my heart was, and so I went into the Peace Corps. I thought before I put my money into graduate school, I'll put money into the ... I'll get some experience on the ground, and I was an agri-forester in Cameroon, northern Cameroon, a very arid land work, and it was extremely powerful, absolutely one of those ... made real that slogan—it's the hardest job you'll ever love—which was the Peace Corps slogan at the time. It was exactly correct. It was terribly hard and extremely fulfilling. And it became clear to me that we ought as a species need to understand how we use the resources that we have before us in a wise way, that we can't just talk about putting them in a drawer, that that's not the real world—in human society, that we're going to be using them. That's going to happen, and how do we use them in a way that improves society but protects the resources. When I was writing all my graduate school applications, I was

describing it in terms of sustainable use, small-s. When I came back, I happened to get into all the graduate schools I applied to, so I got an Amtrak pass and toured the country, looking at all the graduate schools to consider which one, and I hit Wisconsin at a moment when it was super snowy and everyone was grumpy. I'd come from a very hot place, and loved it. And we went polka dancing, so that really nailed it. But I went to lots of great seminars. I loved the culture, the rural culture, that I got to see in that little glimpse, and I never went to any other schools after that. It was clear I wanted to be in Wisconsin, and I started in January of '86, and had one wonderful semester where I didn't have to pay anything or work at all, but then I got a position as an intern with a group called the Wisconsin Rural Development Center, which had started using a sort of a Saul Alinsky organizing model, so they had really listened, the founders and co-founders, and they had gone around the state asking people—what matters to you? What are your concerns? So I came in on the heels of that, and benefitted from the wisdom that had come up from the grassroots. This was smack in the middle of the farm crisis of the mid-'80s, and so what were people worried about? They were worried about use of resources, staying on the farms, creating community culture, helping the rural communities—so, basically, sustainability. So it was exciting. I, ironically, got hired despite my ... I was hoping to secret away that policy background. I was really wanting to do more practical things, and that's not what they wanted to hire me for. He hired me for my "Washington experience," which was frustrating to me at the time and, I have later concluded, quite wise. He understood, I guess, that was in fact my passion, and I have loved doing the policy work I have done ever since. So very shortly thereafter we became involved in a number of initiatives. Our founders really cared a lot about making the land grant universities respond to the interests of the people of the state of Wisconsin. In Wisconsin we have this thing called the Wisconsin idea, which basically means we take the resources of our university and apply them in the practical lives of people in and around the state, as opposed to the ivory tower. There was, when I got there, a wonderful group called the F. H. King—he was a soil scientist who wrote *Farmers of Forty Centuries*—F. H. King Student Group on Sustainable Agriculture, which is how I got to know Ann Robinson. We had sponsored, along with some other folks at the university, a wonderful presentation by none other than Duane Sand, who came and talked about the conservation programs in the 1985 Farm Bill, and it was, in fact, very inspiring to me. It was interesting. You never know where the ripples go, do you? So we became very involved in the university reform aspects of organizing, and that really governed a lot of our thinking, and I began a process ... some of you all may remember the windfall profit tax issue, way back, the idea that oil companies got money unlawfully and they had to do something about it, and states were given a chance to say—here's how we want to reclaim and use the dollars that you guys got. Some people call them the "oil overcharge dollars." Well, in the state of Wisconsin we had a sustainable agriculture demonstration program that the Wisconsin Rural Development Center led, and I became very active on the advisory council for that, and then began developing this work on creating what is now the Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems and getting it through the legislature, which is, I will note, rather policy-ish for somebody who didn't think she wanted to do policy. And around that time we knew about this meeting up in Wilder Forest, and I was so grateful to have gone to that meeting, and immediately became obvious that it was exactly consistent with what we were hearing from farmers in Wisconsin. It was the same set of issues that people were concerned about, and I will say that early-on I really loved the fact that we often had a lot of university people at our meetings, which was healthy. We had a lot of farmers at our meetings, which was critical. We have worked over the years at that. It's not easy, but that was why that nested idea was so critical

and so important to us is, I think, that we captured the benefit of people who had the daily obligation to use the resources in a responsible and sustainable way and make money, which is part of sustainability, and we had people who had the leisure to sit back and think about the system and could bring some of the data and some of the conceptual thinking behind it, and that was really, I think, quite important for our movement. Interesting piece of this movement, I think, has been the nurture. I know, Chuck, you gave a tip of the hat to Ron for his support as the Center, but I'll give a tip of the hat to the center for a couple of important things. You all put together something—I think it was called the Rural Institute, right? Jim Lukens and I went to one of those, and that really was helpful for me. And you all had the concept—you understood the importance of bringing together sort of small colloquia, we'll call it, to really, in a structured way but with plenty of room for input, and we really learned a lot. I've got to say it was one of the most productive trips across the plains I've taken—ever—really powerfully helpful. And you've also established what I hope is—I believe it has been, I hope it always will be, one of the hallmarks of our movement, which is we haven't been known for our turf and our sharp elbows. I think we've been known for nurturing other groups and their capacities, and I remember the time you helped us get funding from the McKnight Foundation. But that's been a bit important. One of the issues in our movement, I know one of the forms of resistance we had early from some of the grassroots groups who formed NSAC or SAC and MSAWG, was this issue that we don't need another group out there taking money from our limited pots. It was a model of scarcity, and I think a couple of things about that—your response has become a norm, I hope—that we help each other. That's one important response. And another one was a model that LSP started, which we've come to call the Marta Cleveland model. She was a staffer you hired to work on communications, and the idea was we could as a whole hire staff from our individual groups to do functions for the whole. So in that spirit Ferd Hoefner called up my boss, Denny Caneff, back in the ... maybe '89, I expect, something like that, and said—you know, I've got a call from a funder with the C. S. Mott Foundation who wants to know what ways we the foundation could be helpful to the movement, and you had said, Ferd—what we need is support on appropriations. And so it came about, long story short, that I, then, became the person who did the grassroots thinking and designing and implementation of campaigns for the annual appropriations process for SAC and MSAWG, etc. It's kind of worked with the campaign and through all the iterations, and now I don't do that anymore; I assist. It's a statement of our growth as a movement that we have our staff, a really great grassroots staff, and really great policy staff that lead it, but I still assist, so I'm pleased to be able to continue to be able to bring some of that history and understanding and the pleasure of doing some of the grassroots work. But that has been a tremendous insight into the movement's functioning, because you never know how poorly a movement functions or how well it functions as when you're having to do that kind of coordination. You know where the joints need to be oiled when you're doing that. So that's been one of my great honors and privileges to have been able to. My last comment is—Amy, I think you spoke of synergies, and I want to speak of synergy, and that is a lot of our community has ... you talked about needing to find power and needing to reach out and find new power. Well, one of the things that is striking to any *New York Times* reader, say, in the last decade, is we have awakened the interest of a lot of writers, a lot of consumers, a lot of people who understand that we have a consumer food movement. Some people call it disparagingly “foodies.” Doesn't matter—we have a lot of people who have hit an understanding of the importance of where their food comes from and at various stages are ripening in their understanding of the role of policy in helping to make that happen. But I want to point out that

some of the programs that Ferd, I think, glancingly mentioned—because he deserves so much more credit, and we do, than his much-too-modest presentation offered—but point out just a few of the programs that we worked on that have enabled that consumer movement to build. Think about the Farmers Market Promotion Program alone. Think of the rise in farmers markets and CSAs, the expansions of CSAs, the direct building of institutional markets. Think of how critical that has been to have as consumers have come to know where their food comes from—that’s been a source of inspiration for a new generation the way Wendell Berry has been for a lot of us—and others have been for a lot of us. But that has been a critical growth point. Ask yourselves—would that have happened without the programs that we have built through this work? That’s one small example of the synergies—yes, we have not been able to crack the nut yet, the big structural issues. We have to keep asking how we will do it. We will do it; I believe firmly we will get there, but we haven’t done it yet. In the meantime, we have created a ferment through the programs we have created, and the people whose businesses have become spokespeople, whose subscribers have become spokespeople, and that is no small power that we have built. And so we need to remember that synergy has been one of our strengths.

RK: Thank you very much, Margaret. I think that’s sort of the perfect segue to what we will do in a few minutes of looking at some of these successes and some of the barriers that were there along the way, and then look more towards the future as we wrap up our session today.

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