

Jim Riddle
Narrator
With Joyce Ford and Doug Nopar

Ron Kroese
Interviewer

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Jim Riddle—JR
Doug Nopar—DN
Joyce Ford—JF
Ron Kroese—RK

DN: This is an interview with Jim Riddle.

RK: This is Ron Kroese interviewing Jim, and with Doug Nopar here as well for questions and comments. Tell me a little bit about your operation here, your farming. First of all how you got into it, and then secondly, I'd like you to summarize, maybe, kind of chronologically, your years of activism to advance sustainable agriculture.

JR: Yeah, well, I guess I should say that I grew up on a small dairy and produce farm in central Iowa, and probably the biggest influence in my environmental ethics—my mother always had a garden and always composted and we got *Organic Gardening* magazine and we never used chemicals, and just grew up that that was how you farmed and how you gardened, and so carried that ethic with me, and even in my college years, which I went to Grinnell College in Iowa and degrees in biology and political science, but even during those years I always had a garden and, except when I had to live on campus, I always lived in the country, only lived a couple of years of my life in a town at all, so I've always been in the country. So I think that has certainly affected my choices, both in a very personal level of having a garden and doing lots of homesteading-type activities—putting up food. But then getting involved in the policy area ... but yeah, first, just our current operation, called Blue Fruit Farm—we have about five acres of perennial fruits, so blueberries, black currants, elderberries, aronia berries, plums, and some other unusual fruits. Now for the last six years that we've been doing that. But previous, when I first moved to Minnesota was around 1980, and had visited this area, southeast Minnesota, which I just fell in love with—the beauty, the ruggedness, and the mixture of woodland and smaller farms and fields and conservation ethic being pretty strong here—and started doing organic produce in the early 1980s, and did about 11 acres of organic produce, mixed vegetables, for quite a few years, and got invited by the previous Winona County Extension Agent, that the city of Winona was wanting to start a farmers market, and Joyce and I were selling in LaCrosse at a farmers market, and so we decided to take a chance. Winona is closer; it's really our home town, and a good food coop there, and a good alternative-minded community of folks, and helped to establish the Winona Farmers Market. Never really realized—it was four couples were kind of the core of the market, and I was drafted to be president, and we formed our own association and set our own rules. Having sold at other markets, we had a chance to correct some of the things that we saw happening at the LaCrosse market, which there, there were no rules that you had to

grow it yourself, so people would bring in who knows what, so we said—you have to grow it or process it yourself within 50-mile radius of Winona. So that was a very early local foods market. And then another thing—LaCrosse didn't have a set start time, and so right from the beginning we said—nobody sells before 7:30 a.m. And what we found in LaCrosse, it just people would be there pawing through your stuff when you were trying to unload and get set up, and somebody else has taken your spot, and it just was disorganized, so we have reserved stalls and a set time, and just eliminate unnecessary tension between growers. Didn't really realize at the time what an impact—I mean, the market is just thriving, Winona Farmers Market, now 40-to-50 vendors on a Saturday, a lot of live music, baked goods, meats, dairy. I mean, there's just all sorts of foods available now. I feel like ... that is a very local kind of policy effort, in a way, very hands-on, that has touched people's lives, has given farmers an opportunity to get started at a very small scale. For some it's quite a significant source of their income, but, more importantly, it's the place to be on Saturday mornings in Winona. I mean, it is thriving, downtown Winona is just ... there's traffic and the restaurants close-by there, the food co-op. We sold there for about 10 years, and then last year we're back for the first time in 21 years.

RK: Oh, really—back with your fruit.

JR: Yeah, with our fruit now, with a new enterprise—Blue Fruit Farm. And I really enjoy the back-and-forth, the banter, the talking to people. It's very much a social event plus a chance to make some money. That's one area where I feel like I've put effort in and it's made a difference.

RK: Oh, definitely, definitely. I was wondering, too, where did organics fit into those early days?

JR: We made a conscious choice. Even though all four of the couples were organic, even one biodynamic, but we made a conscious choice to not limit that in the rules. We wanted it to be local growers regardless. The advantage of the farmers market is if somebody cares to ask, there's the person right there, you can ask them about their methods. And so we wanted just to be very welcoming to any growers that are putting the effort in and wanting to sell locally. That really wasn't a factor for the rules, but we always sold for top dollar, and we would kind of be the price leader on the high end, but people would line up for our stuff. So I think people responded to the quality, and the fact it was organic was certainly a plus.

RK: I would imagine that there were several of those 40-to-50 vendors that are organic.

JR: Oh, yeah, un-huh.

DN: The vast majority.

JR: Yeah, I'd say the majority. There aren't many that are certified. There's a few that are certified. But once again, certification really takes the place of that personal relationship, and so when you have that you don't need certification, but when you start selling in the impersonal markets, doing wholesale and stuff, that's where ... I really believe in certification and strong standards and have put a lot of effort into making sure that the national standards are strong and that they're backed up with a good certification inspection, and because of that is why we got out

of farming for a number of years. In the late '80s I went to a training that the Organic Growers and Buyers Association (OGBA), a former certifier in Minnesota, was holding, and started doing some inspections for them in '87, and then added another certifier, Organic Crop Improvement Association (OCIA), in '88, so I started doing more and more inspections. And then, in the early '90s, got asked by both of those certification bodies to organize and deliver a training of inspectors for them. Unbeknownst to each other, I was asked by both in the same year. I said only one condition, and that's at one training for the two certifiers. And it used to be that certifiers were really a lot of tension between them.

RK: I remember those days.

JR: Right, right. So this was kind of groundbreaking, to get two certifiers to cooperate, but the inspectors were the same, so we'd be a pool of inspectors, we'd see each other at an OGBA event and an OCIA, then an FBO, but we weren't learning what it took to become really professional inspectors, and so by the inspectors getting together, two certifiers in one training, well, in the evenings inspectors sitting around, popcorn and beer and big ideas—we need to have our own association. We need to run our own trainings and meet our own educational needs. Once again I kind of got drafted to lead this effort. I chaired a steering committee first that then led to the adoption of bylaws and election of officers, and that was the formation of the Independent Organic Inspectors Association, which is now the International Organic Inspectors Association—same logo, IOIA, or same acronym. We started organizing trainings that were open to any inspectors for any certifier, whether it was a nonprofit or a state government or a for-profit company and then would have the different certifiers come in. They could do their half-hour presentation, but we focused on all of the common skills that it takes to be a good inspector and started holding those courses first Nebraska, then Arkansas, then California, and got people coming from Japan and Australia and Mexico and Latin America, Canada, and organized trainings all over the world and ran that organization from our house here for eight years, off grid.

RK: Wow.

JR: Un-huh. [Chuckles] And it was a big deal when we got a fax machine. I mean, this was before the age of computers, at least the home computers—we didn't have one. There just was a wide-open niche, a void and the need, obviously, if we had people asking us to go to Australia or Japan or wherever to train organic inspectors. Nobody else was doing it. We started working with the USDA early-on, before the ... well, the organic law, the Organic Foods Production Act, was passed in the 1990 Farm Bill, but it took 12 years to implement, and we were organizing these trainings during the time when the law was on the books but there were no rules to implement it. But we started reaching out to USDA officials and having them come to the trainings, and mostly they came to learn. They weren't familiar with organics. I think we were able to educate them about organic practices and what certification is and what really needs to happen to verify the organic claim. So I think that was a good relationship, but then in 1997, right at Christmas, they issued the first proposed organic rule. It was just really inadequate. It did not reflect what we knew as organic standards, what current state laws ... by that time, 30 states had state laws defining organic, and they ignored the recommendations of their National Organic Standards Board, and this came out. It was now the time of computers, 1997, and I was

scheduled ... like January 10th I was flying to teach a training in Japan, and I had a big ... I had meetings with the ministry officials in Japan scheduled, a big public speech to give and all sorts of things on that trip. So I saw this organic rule that came out December 21st, and I took my whole Christmas-New Year's holidays, and I just picked it apart, line by line. Here's language that's wrong or offensive, here's why, and here's replacement language, based on current standards or recommendations of the Organic Standards Board, and gave a very complete critique of that first proposed rule, and put it out there before I left for Japan. I felt very pressed, but I had to do this because I had to leave. And because I did that depth of analysis, that really informed the rest of the organic community on what was wrong and how to fix it and became kind of the playbook, that then 275,000 comments were submitted. It set a new record at the time for a new proposed rule. Luckily they withdrew that proposed rule and changed some staff people, brought in some state people who'd worked with organic programs, and turned it around. There I think ... I wasn't really thinking about the impact of what I was doing. I was just focused on going to Japan, really, is what was driving me to get this done and out the door. Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan, one time we were at the same conference, and she introduced me to her husband, and she says—and he's the person who's had the most impact on the organic rule. [Laughs] I never thought of it that way ... yeah, she was one that got brought in, actually, to head of the AMS, the Ag Marketing Service, to turn it around. But so then when the second proposed rule came out, which was in March of 2000, that was really recognizable as an organic standard. And then I was commissioned by the Organic Trade Association to compile their comments. It was a lot of fine-tuning of the language, but it was largely acceptable, and they were able to turn it around into a final rule by December of that same year. It kept moving forward by that time. I think it's a very good standard, and I've been involved with the International Federation of Organic Agriculture, and I've been part of the US delegation to Codex, when the organic guidelines were established, and our standard is right in line with European standards, with other international standards, and is actually stronger on livestock.

17 minutes: 15 seconds)

RK: Oh, really?

JR: Yeah, right. So I feel good, and I've seen, since the rule got fully implemented in October of 2002, that ... there's some troubling issues and trends going on, but at the same time it has really legitimized just the whole organic system in the farming and with consumers, gives them confidence, but also businesses to invest. They like stable, predictable regulations, and the other thing that I've seen because of some of the work I do now in the research community, it's really once you have a common language and know what the boundaries are, then you can focus research and research dollars. So, like the University of Minnesota now has over a thousand acres certified organic in five different locations, and a hundred-cow certified organic dairy herd. We wouldn't have that if we didn't have federal standards. So it's really helped advance the science of organic as well as the markets for organic.

RK: And then after that you've been involved, haven't you, on the board to keep those standards as they are? What happened next?

DN: Before you got to next, you should go back to being a soil and water conservation supervisor and the organic cost-share thing.

JR: Right, yeah. So this would be 19 ... well I served a term as a soil and water conservation district supervisor in Winona County in the late '80s. But, I don't know ... the soil and water districts, I mean especially that time, very Good Old Boys. I was very much younger than all the rest of the board and it's like there's a lot of status quo and keep things the way they are. They aren't real forward looking, don't like to rock boats. Don't like to criticize neighbors. [Chuckles]

RK: Even though this area was a pioneering one for the whole soil conservation service.

JR: The second in the country, the first in Minnesota, right. Yeah. During that time on the soil and water board, though, I really became familiar with conservation practices and cost-share programs. At the same time I was doing organic inspections, which that was ... that's why I got out of farming in the mid-1990s is just the whole inspection work took off and you needed to be inspecting other people's farms at the time you should be home farming. So it was not a good mix to simultaneously do, so we quit our vegetable farming operation and really focused on the inspection and training inspectors. So that was a large part of our lives. But I would be inspecting farms that are paying money, they are doing everything the government could possibly want to take care of soil and water, produce good, healthy food, and pay for their own cost of regulation. So I kind of had this idea of why can't there be an organic certification cost-share program that pays a portion of the cost of certification back to a farmer. At the same time there was a state senator, Janet Johnson, who had shops at the Twin Cities coops, and wanted to have a meeting of what can be done to increase the number of organic farmers in Minnesota or support organic farming. So I got invited to a meeting and came with this idea of an organic certification cost share. She liked it, put a staff person, Neil Sorenson, on it, and I worked with him, drafting the language. At that time we had a split legislature, just like we do now. It was a Republican House and I testified, pitched it to the committee as regulatory relief. Here are these producers doing everything you could possibly want, take care of the land and water, and they're having to pay their own cost of regulation. So the state could help provide some regulatory relief. And then pitched it to the Democrats as good environmental protection and progressive, and we had Jesse Ventura who was our governor. So we had tri-partite system, actually. It passed, it was a \$30,000 appropriation, very small, and it paid up to \$200 per farm, first come, first serve basis, of farmers who applied. It was in Jesse's first budget bill, and his first budget bill he went through with a pig stamp, and has line-item veto, and anything he didn't like got the pig, as pork. Well, this survived the pig. [Chuckles] And so it went into law, and that was 1998, and so was the first in the country, organic certification cost-share. Then other states heard about it—Iowa, Montana, North Carolina at least ... Vermont—all adopted cost-share programs. And then, by 2002, worked with Senator Wellstone's staff, Brian Baenig, to get it into the 2002 Farm Bill, and then it went nationwide. Now it's been renewed in 2008, and then again now. So now, nationwide—and it's a much better deal than what we offered in Minnesota—it's now 75 percent of your certification fees, and it's farms and processors, up to \$750 per operation per year. And it's wildly popular in the farming community.

RK: Would that be an example of where the NSAC (National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition) and Ferd Hoefner network came into the picture?

JR: They got supportive; they got behind the idea. Even in Minnesota, when it was before the Minnesota legislature, I had talked with the Farm Bureau lobbyist, Chris Radatz, and it's like—well, we don't support it, but we aren't going to oppose it. They stood aside, and that was pretty significant, really, that they did not oppose it, and Farmers Union supported it. At the national level, certainly—I think it was just the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition at that time.

RK: Right.

JR: They worked with ... Leahy was the chair of the Senate Ag Committee at the time, and, really, they had a lot of influence there with Leahy and Harkin and got them behind it, because Wellstone was still pretty new or didn't have a lot of seniority. So that was probably the most significant policy accomplishment that I've been a part of, or originated.

RK: I did want to get that on the record, too—you were an early cooperative as far as holding land together [overlapping speakers].

JR: Right, yeah, yeah, since the mid-1970s, before we lived here.

RK: Could you say a little bit about what Wiscoy is. It's still going, isn't it?

JR: Oh, yeah—we're here. We live and are members of Wiscoy Valley Community Land Cooperative, which is formed as a cooperative, articles and bylaws filed with the secretary of state of Minnesota, and it's been in existence since the mid-1970s, and was originally three couples who are no longer here, but there are people who came shortly after them who are still here. We came in the early 1980s. But we have 360 acres that the coop owns the land, and then we own shares in the cooperative. So we hold the land in common, but then when like our Blue Fruit Farm operation, we rent that land back from the coop. And then Prairie Moon Nursery, which is a big native plant grower and supplier, started here, and most of our tillable land is in native plants, prairie plants. Then so Prairie Moon rents quite a bit of land. But we have responsibility for our own households and finances, so it's not communal economics. But we do have a number of shared resources—a community center meeting area, and a recreation area, picnic pavilion and swimming pond and volleyball. So a lot of our communal stuff is more recreational or places where we meet. There's a social aspect of it, where we have a number of potlucks, work days, things that we do together, but we also have regular Sunday meetings, which are kind of a combination of meditation, spirituality, kind of sharing of your lives, and business, in an hour-and-a-half on Sunday mornings from 10 to 11:30. And so we have a number of decisions that we need to make in common. You know, can someone put bee hives on the land or something. Or what color to paint the barn. [Chuckles] Some issues are easy, and others are very challenging, very difficult, but we've learned to have an agenda in advance, and someone's agreed to be the facilitator in advance, and minutes are always taken. Some people come regularly, other people come rarely. It's not mandatory, but if you don't come, then you're missing out having a voice in, kind of, the governance of the community.

(28:50)

RK: How many are in the community now?

JR: There's what—20 ...

JF: There's 20 adults.

JR: Twenty adults, about a dozen households.

JF: [Unclear].

RK: In all of this, you all raised two children.

JR: Yeah, we did, un-huh, yeah, yeah.

JF: We have two grandchildren now.

JR: They're pretty ...

RK: Congratulations.

JF: Two twins.

JR: Our daughter's turned out pretty normal.

RK: Sounds like they turned out pretty extraordinary. [All chuckle]

JR: They're well-adjusted.

DN: They turned out more normal than you guys. [All laugh]

JR: Yeah, right, un-huh. Well, there's always that generational skip.

JF: I'm afraid for the grandchildren. [All chuckle]

RK: That's really true. Well, I wanted to ask just a little bit more. So if you have anything to say more about any contribution you feel like the folks like Ferd that have been involved with NSAC, the Chuck Hassebrook, the people like that over the years have contributed that's benefitted, what you see of general benefit to the bigger picture as well as how that affected you and your own operation.

JR: I think having the office there in DC that represents a coalition of groups around the country—I mean, it's really difficult for local or regional groups to have a voice in Washington. And to have consistency. Because Monsanto, Cargill, General Mills, they're there every day. They've got lobbyists, they're represented, not just in Congress but also in the agencies, and there are revolving doors between congressional staff and these companies. To have any chance of having a voice heard, there has to be a presence in DC. And to have continuity and like Ferd

and some of the other people that have been there year after year, it's hard to pull the wool over somebody's eyes if they know what happened in the past and what's been said and what's in the public record, and they know where to look. So I think that's been just critical. My focus has been on the organic side, and I've attended a few of the NSAC meetings, and organic is not a banner issue for NSAC. So there used to be an organic committee within NSAC that really kind of took on a life of its own. But it was awkward, because we'd be focusing on organic policy stuff, but then would we have to get the whole NSAC membership to support or staff or what, and eventually broke off, and it was best for everyone to form the National Organic Coalition. Steve Etko and Liana Hoodes have been the staff people to have that same kind of Washington presence, but specifically focused on the organic part of things, but without having to make sure it wasn't stepping in toes or something or offending some of the other members of, the larger members, of NSAC. So I think it's been a really good model, but, at the same time, I felt so much confidence that the conservation piece is being watched over, shepherded, whatever, by the NSAC people and I could focus my energies and other people, too, on the organic piece of it. So I think it's been a very cooperative, functional partnership.

RK: I was going to ask you—I would hope so.

JR: Yeah, yeah, totally.

RK: Because, when I was talking, for example, with Roger Blobaum, talking with him about all the work he's done in compiling information, and he reminded me that, back in the day, that organics wasn't a priority for the sustainable ag organizations that were shaping up. It was welcome, but it wasn't a policy priority.

JR: Right, right.

RK: But I think it's ... I'm going to pursue that somewhat, but it sounds like, in your view, at least there was cross-pollination and coordination ...

JR: Oh, there was a lot of communication. I'm not active in the National Organic Coalition, but I'm still on their advisory board and get e-mails, so I keep up to date on what's happening, what some of the issues are. Just got invited to a meeting out there next month and a dinner to honor Liana, but I can't make it.

RK: Well, that's too bad.

JF: I would just add the most recent project I think that we've been involved in with NSAC was our very large grant from the USDA, NRCS, to ...

JR: Conservation Innovation Grant, a CIG.

JF: ... to really look at all the practice standards and try to make them more organic farmer-compliant, just so people could understand. And in doing so, educate NRCS. There was a lot of education about what does organic mean and how did all these practice standards, why aren't organic farmers going in and getting them, because they constantly were saying—well, you have

to use chemicals, you have to use chemicals. So there was a really large effort on the large, I mean there was a pretty big group of people that took on this multi-year project to bring all those practice standards into kind of more of a ...

JR: Quite a line-by-line analysis with recommendation for change. I don't know what came of it. It was all submitted, but I don't know how much NRCS has changed either their practice standards or their technical bulletins or whatever.

JF: I'd have to go back and ...

RK: But I think that's one of the things that NSAC does is to raise the true conservation flag in even organics in those programs, such as the Conservation Innovation Grant program. As far as I can tell it seems like one of their real functions.

JR: Un-huh, exactly.

RK: In one of the areas that, when you talk about sustainable agriculture is the whole notion of traditionally has been around the notion of family farms and local and that sort of thing. I'd like to have you talk, maybe both of you, about the issue of the growing interest by big corporations, by the Cargills and General Mills in the world, in organics, and how that tension that's really become apparent, and I just wondered what's your view on it?

(36:00)

JR: Well, yeah. I served on the National Organics Standards Board from 2001 through 2006, and that was at the time of the implementation of the rule was 2002, which that happened, so it was quite the pressure cooker at times. What I saw ... I was fortunate to be serving with a board that even the corporate representatives still had a sense of history and understanding of organic standards at that time, but I was seeing more and more corporation people, in their testimony, in what they were petitioning to have added to the national list to be allowed for organic, to basically be able to conduct business and food manufacturing the same way they always had, but with an organic label. Of shifting the standards, not necessarily at the farm level, but certainly at the processing level, so that they could use organic ingredients and still make Twinkies or whatever they'd like to make, and not have to change their methods of doing business. But the other thing I saw, and this has only gotten much worse, is they got the lobbyists, they are there in the elevators and the hallways every day. And Joyce pointed this out to me, that she was doing taxes and—Jim, do you realize you spent 29 nights in Washington, DC last year? That's a month of my life, but that's still, compared to the corporate people there—they're there all the time! [Chuckles] That was a lot. It's just so hard to counter that level of influence, and then they get hired staff people, appointed, and just infiltrate the whole government regulatory system. So now we have 10,000-head organic dairies. We have 100,000 organic chickens. That's not ... I just don't understand how that can be certified, so it makes me question the certification and the inspection side of it, because it's being approved by some certifier, and then that certifier is being accredited by USDA, so they're supposed to be looking into the business and make sure that they're maintaining the program. And then when there are complaints filed, like Cornucopia

Institute, with photographs, aerial photographs of these operations, they're being dismissed by USDA—just saw that yesterday. So they're getting their money's worth.

RK: Just in my work in philanthropy, and reading about it, and being somewhat exposed to it, the tension around—well, if we're really going to get organics to take hold, we've got to look towards the General Mills of the world. So that's sort of the other argument, and how that's all going to play out...

JR: It's not that different than anything else. It is following kind of the standard agricultural food system model that we have.

RK: Right.

JF: At the same time, I think that it still allowed, it encouraging, and the number of organic acres is steadily increasing, and I don't know if you are familiar with non-GMO, *Organic and Non-GMO Report*, but that's really a pretty good publication, and they just had a really interesting story about a group of companies getting together to talk about how they can increase the soybean production in the United States, because a lot of it's coming from Brazil and China and India, too, or something. And so then these companies approach the farmers, and then the farmers are saying—well, we would like to have all of our crop rotation be purchased, not just the soybean-type thing. So now they're meeting, and they're going to be working on this issue. These aren't just small companies that are doing this, and so to me it's like I remember one time a farmer came up to me at the Minnesota organic conference, and was upset, because I'm out there inspecting farmers that he didn't feel were organic enough. My feeling was those people met the standards, I was talking with them. It's up to the community to foster the attitudes to get them to be organic enough, that kind of stuff. So to me it's not just that the regulatory's piece that is responsible for ... now, anyway, that's all; just leave it at that.

JR: But, yeah, we're importing 70 percent of the organic soybeans used in this country now, and close to 50 percent of the organic corn. Now if there's two crops that we should be able to grow organically in abundance, it's corn and soybeans. What that tells me ... one, that there's tremendous demand, especially for organic poultry, but also dairy, so there's a very strong demand. But what it really tells me is we haven't invested at all. We have no national strategy to convert conventional farms to organic—we don't. Every country in Europe does. There's over 48,000 organic farms in Italy, and there's less than 20,000 in the entire United States. Over 35 percent of the dairy farms in Denmark are organic. This hasn't been by accident; it's because they've had a strategy since the 1990s of both incentive payments and technical assistance to convert your farm from conventional to organic, and it's paid off. They're protecting their water and their farmers—much more family farms still in existence in those countries as well. Here, when we have had very limited transition payments, which NRCS used to have in a few states, those were eliminated. Those, the federal office made the states, including Minnesota, get rid of those. And instead, we have you can get money for a conservation activity plan for transition to organic that helps you identify the resource concerns on your farm, and if you're in transition or certified organic, you can be in a separate pot of money to fund those conservation practices. It doesn't help you actually convert your farm to organic, and once you write this lengthy plan out, it doesn't help you get certified, so it's just an exercise in futility, really, to be able to qualify for

the same money that you could have without doing it, just because it's the same suite of conservation practices. If you get in this pot, in the organic and transition, you're limited to \$20,000 of conservation money. If you're not in this pot, you can go up to \$300,000, so [Chuckles] it's totally ineffective, and it should be replaced, and this is my number one farm bill priority in the future, and it has been for awhile. We should have a national transition to organic program, where there's an incentive or there is a financial safety net equal to what you'd get by staying conventional. That's all, nothing more, just eliminate the risk for that three years of time it takes to go from conventional to organic, but then limit it—you don't keep getting it forever, so it actually will end up saving money on farm payments, farm bill programs ...

JF: It will really help water quality.

JR: ... and help water quality and get farmers into free market farming instead of government assistance paycheck-type of agriculture. But it has to be accompanied with technical assistance, too, because I still get calls out of the blue—I'm thinking about going organic; what should I do? But they should be able to call their conservation office and their extension offices and get reliable information. So there needs to be a combination of financial support and technical assistance, and there's plenty of successful models to look at, but they're across the water in Europe.

(46:41)

RK: Well, you know, you've artfully answered what was to be my last question. What is your priority for where you think, like in this case NSAC, but probably NSAC working with the National Organic Coalition should have as a priority for policy going forward?

JR: That to me is the most significant, and increasing the organic research money. It's pretty much been stuck at \$20 million since ...

RK: And I've heard, too, not just organic from other people that are really trying to move forward with cover crops that there has been very little research on cover crops, which certainly could benefit organic farming and conventional farming.

JR: And public breeding. We have totally lost the infrastructure at the universities that we used to have of public breeding programs, because it's all been privatized, because it's all patented now, with all the traits. So, yeah, I think those are really significant ones. But instead of a transition program, what the Organic Trade Association got through in the last farm bill was the first steps in establishing an organic check-off, which a lot of farmers that have participated in check-offs, whether it's beef or whatever, have not been happy with them, have not seen the results filter back down to benefit farmers, and now certain parts of the organic community have gotten that into the farm bill for the secretary to authorize a vote, or to be authorized to have a referendum on an organic check-off. I really have problems with that. It's really been divisive in the organic community, which is something we didn't need, and is unnecessary. When we need more organic farmers and we have markets for things as common as organic corn and soybeans that are being unmet, now we're going to put a tax? And we have no strategy to grow organic farmers out of the conventional farmers or beginning farmers, and now you say, OK, you take

this risk for three years, and after you have gotten certified, now you're going to be taxed on top of that. It's like it's a disincentive instead of an incentive, at the end of the day. Then it's a USDA-appointed board, and ...

JF: And they still can't say that organic food is healthier.

JR: Yeah, well, it would actually become government-speech, about what can be said through using promotion dollars to support organic, so it cannot criticize biotech or point out differences with pesticide contaminated foods. [Chuckles]

RK: You said that was the Organic ...?

JR: Trade Association.

JF: OTA.

RK: Which is a pretty broad group, includes the bigger operations.

JR: Oh, yeah, totally. It's been more and more so.

RK: Where did ... did NSAC weigh in on that at all?

JR: I don't know that NSAC has. A lot of the NOC (National Organic Coalition) members are not supportive at all, but National Coop Grocers Association is a NOC member, and they are supportive of it. So NOC hasn't taken an official position, because they typically operate by consensus on their policy positions.

DN: I doubt NSAC would support it.

RK: I don't think it sounds like it ...

JR: Farmers Union's not.

DN: I know LSP's, we're not super-active, but if NSAC got active supporting it, I bet you LSP would step in.

RK: I bet so, yeah.

DN: Adam Wartheson worked hard against a number of check-off programs, and now he's working for Organic Valley, and Organic Valley's in favor of it.

JR: Their leaders are—I don't think their farmers are. Farmers are not supportive of this idea, and so if it goes to a vote, which it's moving that direction, I think it will fail, I really do.

JF: Do you remember that LSP was the organization that got Jim and I involved in organic policy work?

JR: Yeah, yeah.

RK: I remember that.

JF: Well, so, OGBA (Organic Growers and Buyers Association), the certifier up in the Twin Cities, was looking for some board members, some rural people, and I think you were kind of asked and but then they [Unclear].

JR: We were busy building a house and just didn't have time, but ...

JF: I ended up volunteering, but I didn't have enough money to pay for me to even go up to the Twin Cities, and so LSP paid for my travel expenses to go to those monthly meetings for several years when I was on the board. That made it possible. Then that was the step to go get inspector training, organic inspector training, through OGBA with the first training.

JR: Because you were on the board of OGBA.

RK: Lots of good things, so that's great. Well, I've taken quite a bit of your time on a nice day. I wanted to say that Joyce Ford is on this recording, and it's May 22 of 2015. So thanks a lot for doing it. I think this will be a good thing.

JR: Well, good luck.

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