

Kate Clancy
Narrator

Ron Kroese
Interviewer

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Ron: It's October 5, 2015 and today I'm at the University of Minnesota where I'm talking with Kate Clancy. She's a Senior Fellow for the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, a visiting scholar at the Center for a Livable Future at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, as well as an adjunct professor at the Friedman School, Tufts University. Kate, how did you get interested even from childhood in the issues around food and agriculture?

Kate: I don't know where it came from but I told my folks when I was 4 years old that I was going to work in food. And...

Ron: 4 years old?

Kate: Yes, I was always interested in food. I had an uncle who had an incredible garden and I started cooking when I was really young. When I was in high school I loved chemistry and I said to my chemistry teacher, "You know, I like chemistry a lot and I want to work in food. What could I do?" So he said "No idea, but I'll talk to some people." And he came back a couple of weeks later and said, "I heard about this field called Dietetics." So I said, "Okay, I'll do that." So I went to the University of Washington to major in nutrition. It turned out that I also liked economics, and that interest in economics led eventually to a lot of the food systems work I've done.

I went to Berkeley to earn a Ph.D. in the Nutrition Sciences Department because my mentor at the UW had done the same. When I got there I discovered another interest in public health nutrition. To my great benefit in 1968 I was asked to be part of the committee which developed the first major at the school in the conservation of natural resources I learned so much about ecology and other disciplines, and then I actually got to teach for two years in the new major. It was a remarkable time. Mark Lappe did the lectures on organic and pesticides – this is 1968. Thomas Jukes, the Nobel Prize winner was in the chemistry department telling anyone who would listen how terrible organic agriculture was -- how it was ridiculous, how it was not needed, how it was going to destroy agriculture. At the same time I was asked by one of my mentors to co-lead with another doctoral student the first hunger study in the State of California since the Depression. So pieces were coming together.

When I was finishing I saw there was a new position at Cornell. They were looking for somebody to teach community nutrition. And I realized with my background in hunger research, my interest in food programs and policy -- an interest which also started early and was strongly reinforced being at Berkeley (Laughing) in the '60s -- my background in ecology by that point, and my knowledge of organic agriculture, I'd be a good fit for them. . And so I taught community nutrition there and I taught other courses in nutrition. But I really was teaching -- more or less without naming it -- food systems. Unfortunately, because departments were in such strong siloes at that time I didn't get tenure for several

reasons. The first, I found out later, was because I taught a graduate seminar on nutrition policy, and a lot of the faculty said “She did her degree in biochemistry. How could she possibly know anything about policy?” I must mention that I was also not granted tenure because I was a woman-part of the largest class-action suit brought against a university for failing to grant tenure to women.

The segue to my next job was quite interesting. I had done a classic nutrition dissertation on the effects of thyroid hormone on a lipid enzyme in rats, but had no interest in doing that type of research again. So I chose to study the effects of television advertising on children’s diets.

Ron: Wow.

Kate: Because of my research on TV advertising, when the Federal Trade Commission published for comment a proposal to develop a Trade Regulation Rule (TRR) for food advertising I felt I should contact them. I then did some consulting with the staff working on the TRR. And when I didn’t get tenure the FTC folks asked me if I would take the nutritionist position that was open. And I said “Yes”.

Ron: Is that during the Carter administration?

Kate: That was the Golden Era.

Ron: Yeah, it was.

Kate: So those five years in DC were wonderful... This was the last time that FDA, USDA, and FTC worked together closely, I mean really closely on all kinds of trade regulations, new labeling policy, and new dietary guidance – the first dietary guidelines. Carol Foreman was at USDA. Mike Pertschuk was at the FTC and Donald Kennedy was at the FDA.

Ron: Right.

Kate: In the summer of 1977 Lynn Parker moved to DC to be the first nutritionist at FRAC, Bonnie Liebman became the first nutritionist at the Center for Science in the Public Interest, and I started at the FTC. They had both taken graduate degrees at Cornell. We worked and played with nutrition specialists from the McGovern Committee, local public health departments and various non-profits. The “food rule” contained many requirements/standards for making claims about nutrients, but it also included sections on organic and natural. This brought me into the organic world and I worked with many experts on the development of the proposed definitions. So I had the opportunity to learn a good deal about the organic agriculture and processing industries. In the meantime the Commission had also decided to initiate the Children’s Advertising Rule and I worked with another nutritionist on many of the components of that effort. The pressure on the Commission from the food industry was so strong that they stopped the proceedings on both rules –the Washington Post called the FTC “the nation’s nanny”.

Ron: Yeah, I was in Washington during the Carter years. I worked for Senator Jim Abourezk as his press aide. So I, some of those names mean...

Kate: Yeah, well there would be a lot of Senate and House names we would know. So then Ronald Reagan got elected.

Ron: Yes, he did.

Kate: Immediately they brought in very conservative lawyers. I was asked to go to one of their offices one day and was told in no uncertain terms that there was nothing for me to do at the Federal Trade Commission anymore. That was it!

Ron: Wow!

Kate: All this consumer protection around food and nutrition was, you know, viewed as some kind of liberal plot. They weren't saying that but that's what they were thinking. Before I left they published a new "manifesto" for the FTC remit reinterpreting the First Amendment to give more protection to advertisers.

I went looking for another job and found it at Syracuse University, where I would teach a course titled food, environment, and nutrition. Although the term wasn't in wide use yet, that was the food systems course that I developed in 1982. It covered everything, from the history of farming to ecological principles underlying every part of the food system. I was also asked by the doctoral students to teach a food policy seminar which started with an introduction to public policy. Then another policy opportunity arose. Not long after I arrived in Syracuse I was introduced to an activist who was trying to form a food policy council. Through a mutual friend in Washington I had gotten to be friends with Bob Wilson – the UT professor who helped start the first Food Policy Council in North America in Knoxville, Tennessee. When I moved I hoped to be able to do something and was really interested in what David the activist was doing. He had already talked the head of the County Cooperative Extension into working with him. And then somebody told them that I was in town and I knew something about food policy councils. So we started the second food policy council in the United States.

Ron: Oh, you did?

Kate: In 1984 in Onondaga County. We called it a Food System Council because we wanted to go beyond policy issues, and functioned under the aegis of the Onondaga County Council. It continued for 11 years, during which I had useful experiences with on-the-ground food policy of every possible kind; mainly agriculture but a lot of wholesale, distribution, inner-city retail, farmers' markets, farmland preservation, public health, small business, and many other areas.

Ron: Hmm.

Kate: Another activity which went on for many years came from a significant grant a colleague and I received from the state Department of Health to study hunger and emergency food in the State of New York. We studied clients of food pantries and soup kitchens and food stamp recipients throughout the State, and engaged Jan Poppendieck to work with us in New York City which up to that time had not been studied. So we were steeped in multiple types of food security surveys and policy analyses which stood me in good stead later.

Because of my work at the Federal Trade Commission on organic, in 1984 the Board on Agriculture appointed me to the committee that in 1989 released *Alternative Agriculture* the first report from the NAS on organic agriculture. That was an intense experience and taught me about research and disciplines which still inform my research and writing.

In 1985 I was in DC on sabbatical at Resources for the Future and had the good fortune to hang out at meetings on the 1985 farm bill where I met Ferd (Hoefner) and many people in the alternative agriculture community who were a large part of the nucleus of what became NSAC. In 1986, Garth Youngberg invited me to write an article for the first issue of the Journal of Alternative Agriculture on the connections between sustainable agriculture and health. I still remember how much work it took but I was very happy to be pulling the two fields together. Several years later Garth asked me to join the board of the Institute for Alternative Agriculture, where I was introduced to and worked with so many people who are still very good friends.

Going back a bit, very soon after I got to Syracuse Richard Haynes called me to ask me to prepare and present a paper on ethics and food processing. He knew about my work at the FTC on organic and natural and was just starting his work on agricultural ethics which led to the founding of the Journal and then the Agriculture and Human Values Society. I remember telling him I didn't know much about ethics but I would be willing to put something together titling my presentation "Ethical Issues in Food Processing and Marketing: a Nutritionist Talks about Moral Fiber ". It was at that meeting that I first met a slew of longtime friends and colleagues – Richard, Willie Lockeretz, Fred Buttel, Peggy Barlett, Paul Thompson and so many others. Later Richard asked me to prepare an article on that topic for the first issue of the Journal of Agriculture and Human Values.

Ron: Right.

Kate: All of these interests involved policy of one kind or another. And I'm realizing that I haven't said what the origins of my interest in policy were. Both my Mom and Dad were engaged in policy at different levels and different issues, my Dad especially. So I was steeped in policy discussions and union discussions, because my aunt was prominent in Boeing's Machinists Union. And my Dad was a member of the union so we experienced a number of strikes and conversations about the "little guy".

Ron: I'm glad you mentioned that.

Kate: My work on policy became more visible through the Food Systems Council and the writing that I did about councils around the country in the late 1980s. The first state policy councils were called Nutrition Policy Councils. Most people in agriculture never knew about them, but they were in essence the earliest food policy councils. New York State initiated the first state food policy council that covered the entire food system. It was active from 1986 to 1990 – then the administration changed. We did a major report on the future of the New York food system and encouraged activities around the state.

So fast forward 10 years. I was engaged in a number of activities with the Institute. Sometime in 1997 I decided I was ready to leave the University. For the first time in my life teaching wasn't fun. I had been giving Garth advice about what I thought could be in a five-year grant proposal to develop food and agricultural policy which the Kellogg foundation wanted to award the Institute and how they might approach it. So one day Garth called me and said, "Would you want to come down here and run this Kellogg grant?" And I said, "Yes, definitely."

I hired Lydia Oberholtzer and Liz Higgins and we developed the Wallace Agricultural Policy Project (WAGPOL). We conducted 17 visioning sessions at the local, regional, and national level and worked with the local and regional groups for three years after their sessions. That effort resulted in 99 policy ideas which arose out of the sessions, and were vetted at a national meeting in Washington. The report got

some good attention and several organizations which first formed as groups to participate in the project are still in place such as the Southwest Marketing Network. We were also credited by some of the people we worked with for inspiring and training them to continue work on food policy.

Ron: Good.

Kate: Part way through the WAGPOL project the Wallace Institute merged with Winrock International and in the end that merger didn't work because Winrock didn't engage in policy analysis and was not comfortable with what we were doing and our difficulty in finding funding for our policy work.

Ron: Yeah.

Kate: Anyway, my next job was at the Union of Concerned Scientists. And that was heavily policy-oriented to issues like the grass-fed standard, bioenergy, and others.

Ron: Right.

Kate: It was easy and good to stay engaged with the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) one way or another mainly through its Research and Education Committee but at various times other committees. Given the focus of a lot of the visioning sessions at Wallace we were doing a lot more learning and policy analysis around rural development. At one point I did speak at several NSAC meetings about my hope that NSAC might take a different approach to rural development and how I thought it could be more successful if it embraced more of the issues.

In 2006 I became a self-employed. I called myself a food systems consultant which is the title under which I do most of my work. Over time I developed three affiliations with different universities. The first, in 2007, was the rotating endowed MISA Chair at the U of M, which I'd been hoping to occupy ever since my good friend Ken Taylor had worked so hard to bring MISA and the endowed chair into existence. A couple of years later, because I was already advising and working with several people on their staff, I was invited to become a visiting scholar at the Center for a Livable Future at Johns Hopkins. They were moving away from some of the work they'd been doing on the problems with industrial agriculture and turning their attention to studying and advocating for food systems issues. I advise them on many of these projects, reports etc., including the national food policy network which Anne Palmer and Mark Winne have developed over the last four years.

Finally, again because I had been working with people at Tufts in the school of nutrition and in the Agriculture Food and Environment Program for many years I was designated an adjunct professor to do some teaching in their food systems courses and also to be part of a team pursuing a grant with Hugh Joseph to do more work on sustainable diets. Hugh had been keeping this hope alive since the 1980s when Joan Gussow and I coined the term sustainable diets in 1986 – after I'd addressed the idea for the first time in a talk in 1983. The 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee took up the notion and pursued it quite far, but Congress, under siege from the meat industry, put a lot of pressure on the Secretaries of Agriculture and HHS who put a stop to it and they did. The group at Tufts continues to work on developing a framework for how to think about preparing sustainable dietary guidance. And the interference by Congress brought many environmental groups to the table on a dietary issue for the first time. Many of them are continuing their work so at some point dietary guidelines for sustainability will

exist. And with each of those affiliations I've done a mix of work around food systems. Much of that work engages policy in one way or another.

Ron: Yeah.

Kate: Just to finish off the last piece where there are policy implication. I was a member of the panel that prepared the Institute of Medicine food systems report titled, A Framework for Assessing Effects of the Food System that came out in January 2015. We hope it will strongly encourage policymakers, practitioners and researchers to bring a more solid understanding of systems to their activities. I hope you've read it.

Ron: No. I haven't actually. I've just read articles about it.

Kate: Okay so that's it.

Ron: This was so really, really important. I wanted to just backtrack on one thing to have you talk about it. Why was it important to use term "Food System." Why did you like that word "food" so much more than "nutrition"?

Kate: Well, I can't say I stopped being a nutritionist. It's just that nutrition is a small part of food. Quite early in my career I got to where I thought that nutrition as a discipline was too narrow and constricting. I mean there are interesting things and very important things inside the field, but you can't do useful problem solving through a single lens.

Ron: Right.

Kate: You have to understand problems through a food systems approach which, when you think about it, encompasses a large part of what goes on in the natural and political world.

Ron: So it brings in a whole realm of society issues, of agricultural practices, and all of that when we're thinking food.

Kate: Absolutely. Another project I've been a part of for quite a long time is Agriculture of the Middle (AOTM). The Ag of the Middle work is strongly related to food systems. First of all it engages the whole supply chain, and it engages policy. Ferd and I, and everybody at NSAC, with help from Stew Smith at various times and a couple of other people, did the federal level Ag of the Middle policy work. And in fact, every year at the AOTM research meeting I'm asked to give the policy update to the whole group. Most of them are not that interested in policy, but they respond quite positively to the briefings that they get once a year. And sometimes they'll do something if we can prod them enough. Ferd has always been willing. So Ferd and NSAC carry all the work that we did on getting local and mid-size and regional considerations into legislative language.

Ron: Right.

Ron: So your work with Ferd and the Sustainable Agriculture Working Groups that were formed -- to begin with mostly in the Midwest and grew from there -- you've connected with those quite early on?

Kate: Yes I'd have to think... it was not long after the Midwest SAWG was formed that I knew something about it. And then I helped start -- Alison Clarke did most of the work -- the New York SAWG. I was in Syracuse when Kathy Ruhf started NESAWG and was soon engaged with it.

Ron: That's when we met.

Kate: yes, right.

Ron: Because I was at those early Midwest SAWG meetings, and the whole effort around policy -- beyond just the research aspect that the Center for Rural Affairs was particularly focused on -- and deeper into the subsidy issues...

Kate: Which of course became one of the leitmotifs of the whole NSAC experience.

Ron: Right.

Kate: And the issue arose... are we going to work on (commodity) subsidies or are we not going to work on subsidies? Because we had all these Midwest people who didn't want to work on subsidy reform. I mean it was amazing; there was so much going on there, and over a long period of time.

Ron: Well, I talked to Roger Blobaum about this. He's working on compiling the history of organic -- working with the University of Wisconsin's archival people there. And Roger touched on one of the things I'm trying to get at: what are the tensions that were there right from the beginning? Well, there were a couple of tensions in particular. One tension was about to what extent should we focus, as the Land Stewardship did, on the whole concept of the farming itself and stewardship-based practices as a way to get us away from the industrial paradigm and all its societal and environmental problems, versus another camp which saw achieving parity in crop prices has the solution.

Kate: Right. Yes.

Ron: There were some real tensions there. I don't know if you recall that or not.

Kate: Well, I would have recalled them more from the positions of specific people and reading the various newsletters that groups were publishing.

Ron: Yeah.

Kate: At that time I was hanging out with Mark Ritchie a lot; at the time I came to Minneapolis at least twice a year and I stayed with Mark and Nancy. So I knew of those discussions.

Ron: Yes, so there was that tension. At the same time there was also tension with some of the larger environmental groups that were getting more and more interested in the environmental aspects of agriculture. And I remember feeling like there were some of those groups with which we were trying to work on policy changes that really didn't seem to care how many farmers we had or about other rural social concerns as long as the farms were cleaner -- using fewer chemicals...

Kate: The meeting in Chicago and the meeting in Minneapolis with that group that W. K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) convened when we were doing everything in our power to get them to have a clue what rural development was. And they said, "No, we're not interested in rural development." I mean those were stunners. I was at several of those meetings, yes. The irony is that WKKF was working so hard to try to bring the various sides together.

Ron: Looking back I think really one of the good things that has happened over the years is that those tensions are diminished now, with more and more of the focus on the stewardship issues and much of it in the context of food systems.

Kate: Well, I think regarding some of the food systems issues it's not diminished, Ron. It's not gone away.

Ron: No?

Kate: Especially with regard to the public health and anti-hunger issues. Some of the WKKF efforts have been...

Kate: My bias would be at different places. I understand that. And you and Chuck tried as well with the Center for Rural Affairs taking the lead. I would love to get a really smart person's take on what and why there was no way that it could go forward. Or was that true? Was there no way that a compromise could be achieved or did we settle?

Ron: I think most of the sustainable agriculture and family farm advocates of that time shared an overall vision of a healthy rural landscape and agreed that federal policies needed to change to help farmers thrive. However, some of us disagreed with the notion that achieving parity commodity prices would assure good conservation practices. Those folks maintained that the reason there wasn't better stewardship on the land was because farmers were paid so poorly for the crops they couldn't afford to be good stewards. And, if the prices went up people would then be better stewards. If there was evidence of that being true it would have been seen when corn and soybean prices went way up a few years ago...

Kate: Right.

Ron: Instead, a lot of fragile land that had been set aside through programs like the Conservation Reserve Program was plowed back into commodity crop production. As the old rueful saying goes: there are two things that will cause degradation of farmland -- high prices and low prices.

Kate: That's unfortunate.

Ron: So anyway, that was something that...

Kate: Absolutely yes.

Ron: ...was bugging me right from the beginning.

Kate: Well Mark and I did not have long conversations about this. What bugged me about it was it was unrealistic. It was not going to happen so why were we going down that road?

Ron: Right.

Kate: I'm just so pragmatic... The other tension that's really been so strong is with the anti-hunger groups, regarding the issues of the need for food stamps and civil liberty arguments about what can be bought with them. Again there was never the right person or the right sponsor with just enough resources who ever tried to pull the sharp people together and found some type of compromise. It never happened. I wrote about and taught it. And part of it is the personalities, you know? That's the real world. Part of it I think is that nobody ever took the time to say, "If we really thought this through and engaged a skilled facilitator and just the right people in the room, we could come up with some kind of statement about where we could work together."

Ron: And you're really talking about – at least on the policy front the way I understand it – the tension is that the Farm Bill also includes the nutrition programs like SNAP, and in order to get them funded, deals are cut that are counter to the advancement of sustainable agriculture.

Kate: Yes, that's been the key issue with many NSAC organizations, but with others it's included in what I mentioned above.

Ron: Yeah, right.

Kate: I still ask whether there is some resolution. I think now that we have so much more fluency in systems thinking we could move a lot of the discussion of all of these points along. But you know people have to think it's useful and want to do it, and want to trust people, and want to do it in a fair way.

Ron: Yes, and I was just going to say that. Maybe it'll take another 35 years, but I think this work you've been doing – you and others – around bringing the issues of sustainability into nutrition standards should have an impact on that whole way of thinking about it. For example, understanding you're not going to get the healthy food that low-income folks need if we maintain this industrial agriculture system and all of its impacts on food production and food quality.

Kate: And, food security.

Ron: Yes.

Kate: I mean food security in the original definition of the ability of a country to produce a significant amount of its staple foods. Community food security is a different concept with a focus on low income populations. But Ron I'm saying more than that. I'm saying that bringing sustainability into nutrition is only one piece. What's more important is realizing that we can't make good policy – and we have not been making the best policy, if we're not recognizing that at least the four major areas of health, economics, social, and environmental elements are brought together. People use the term food systems. They're rarely applying systems thinking to their work.

I'm biased but I think that the IOM report can be quite helpful. The week after it came out friends of mine working on several food policy efforts in Washington State used our framework. They said it was just what they needed to figure out where the gaps were in their policy work and what the groups wanted to address. And it made everybody in the groups stop and say, "All right. We have to look at economics,

and social issues, and the environment, and health all at the same time when we are doing analyses of food systems and making policy recommendations". You know people have said for such a long time that systems concepts are too hard, and that they're unreal. But I think that's a knee-jerk reaction, and many people have never thought enough about how useful it could be. I'm hoping that the precedents and models will help groups see how useful a systems approach can be. The best thinking coming out of Europe on food and agricultural issues is all systems-oriented. You can't say that about the U.S. We're quite far behind in most of the systems research on agriculture and food systems.

Ron: Yes

Kate: Another example, if you'll permit me, is a five-year grant from USDA/NIFA to study food systems in the Northeast region. We are in our sixth year after looking at multiple components of the food system through multiple lenses under the rubric of the two definitions of food security we spoke about earlier.

Ron: Good to know. Moving along, I was thinking about the contributions Rodale Institute made.

Kate: Oh, yes...

Ron: Rodale's Craig Cramer and I had a nice article in Garth Youngberg's Journal of Alternative Agriculture. Mark Ritchie was going through his papers recently and he sent it to me. I didn't have it. I'd forgotten all about it. But it made me think about Craig -- I'm still friends with him. And it reminded me that the whole Rodale effort was so powerful for a while. That's when I was working with the Land Stewardship Project and connecting in with the group Practical Farmers of Iowa.

Kate: Well, they were powerful and, as you know, the LISA program owed a lot to the fact that Rodale paid Sara Ebenreck's salary so she could work on LISA with Neill Schaller at the Institute for Alternative Agriculture. I was at several of those meeting in DC and was fascinated by how so many different perceptions of what was needed and how it should be put together were eventually reconciled

Kate: Rodale was really important. And the fact that Bob Rodale paid Sara to do so much on the LISA, on the original legislation, was critical support. Plus they were doing their long-term organic production trials under Bill Liebhardt.

Ron: So I just wanted to get that out there. And I feel like one of the tragedies along the way was Bob Rodale getting killed.

Kate: Was in that crash in Russia.

Ron: The world would be different place somewhat. You know that...

Kate: Yeah, I think so too.

Ron: The steam went out of the...

Kate: and then they just made -- they foundered for quite a while

Ron: Yeah, that's the way it appeared to me as well.

Kate: All the way along. Rodale was such an important part of all the work on developing a more coherent knowledge base and language about soil quality.

Ron: Yeah.

Kate: That was critical. And Doug Karsten at Iowa State and the Rodale people and many other folks were part of those research projects, and then participated in discussions among themselves to pull some of the knowledge together.

Ron: Right.

Kate: There were so many really important people. Paul Johnson when he was at NRCS; Karl Stauber when he was at USDA.

Ron: Right.

Kate: Oh, Ken Taylor. Ken Taylor too.

Ron: Oh yes, Ken Taylor. Yeah, he was mentor of mine...

Kate: And one of my closest friends.

Ron: Yeah. He was key to the development of the MISA.

Kate: Yes, absolutely.

Ron: It was Ken's chutzpah really a lot that effort moving...

Kate: And savvy. It was chutzpah and savvy.

Ron: Yes.

Kate: I mean it was amazing. He was amazing.

Ron: Ken's death from brain cancer was hard. But yeah, Ken has a legacy that still lives on in the wonderful St. Paul Market and its commitment to locally grown right from the very beginning.

Kate: That's right.

Ron: And his relationship with the mayor, George Latimer was a big help.

Kate: The Minnesota Food Association was so important here. There were many other examples, but there was nothing like MFA anywhere else in the country with regard to the depth and the creativity that they showed with their actions and programs. There really wasn't. There are some examples of people who did things like it. Ken talked about citizens from the very beginning instead of consumers--and was the first to do that. And then the structure of the SAWGs, that's obviously a big piece of this.

Ron: Well, I was thinking of talking to Vic DeLuca too...

Kate: Oh, my gosh yes. He and the Noyes Foundation were seminal. They supported the early work and stayed at it so long.

Ron: And he played a big role in getting the Sustainable Ag and Food System Funders effort going.

Kate: Right, and Jean Wallace Douglas helped a lot with that too. She ran the Wallace Genetics Foundation endowed by the profits from her father Henry Wallace's Pioneer Seed Company. Garth very strongly wanted to name the Institute for Alternative Agriculture after Henry Wallace and did that I think in 1995.

Ron: Yeah. Well, the last thing I wanted to touch on here today is are 2 or 3 things looking forward that you would say NSAC needs to focus on going forward. Also where did it fail? We didn't talk about that much either but there's been some big failures. The thing that was coming through with a big panel that we convened down in Iowa was we really didn't get at the underlying structure in the profound way that needs to happen – speaking of the systems. We still have that problem that Wendell Berry points out that – I think it was from Wendell Berry where first I heard it -- how can you have a sustainable agriculture in an unsustainable larger system?

Kate: Right. Right. I hope that people who read his work talk about that and recognize what agrarianism can offer in this time – but also bring a pragmatic sense regarding politics, economics, population growth, climate change, and other issues ...

Ron: Yeah.

Kate: it's easy to slip into a vision of a perfect future.

Ron: Yeah, it's real easy to go that way.

Kate: It is way too easy, and some people see future thinking that way. I don't find it useful, but others certainly do. It's too easy to go that way. The harder thing is to say, all right, what's actually possible to do about the structure of agriculture? To start there. Not start with what an ahistorical vision we have about what it might look like. Because it...

Ron: I guess I think we need some sort of a bigger vision to inspire us or to open up...

Kate: But we already have that, Ron. We've – people have done that a thousand times. That vision is everywhere. What we don't have are scenarios that guide people from one action to the next. Because those have to be more practical and pragmatic. If you keep updating a transition scenario where you're making yourself move incrementally you'll get to something (many things) which have been thought about strategically and are likely to succeed. I've found with my work with communities that if you do the aspirational vision it often doesn't help them move to action. They don't have any place to start.

Ron: Oh.

Kate: That's how we did the WAGPOL project. We used the soft systems process but we said that the vision should be grounded in reality. What we want out of this are actions and strategy you can start working on next week with medium and longer-term goals to follow.

(Note: The following final comments from Kate were added on 12/14/2016)

But returning to your question about what NSAC might think about going forward. My thoughts go to process issues, not specific policies. There is a paper just out (Toward Thick Legitimacy: Creating a Web of Legitimacy for Agroecology by deWit and Iles 2016) that addresses this question in what I think is a new and useful way. The authors point out that industrial agriculture has a strong legitimacy – is credible and authoritative – while agroecology does not yet have this legitimacy. For agroecology to become a new norm, it must create a “thick” legitimacy, pulling together scientific, political, civic, legal, practical, and economic strands to build its credibility. This is a challenge that I think NSAC and other academics and NGOs should take up.

Ron: Sounds right – this would require thinking in a more critical way about the structure of agriculture and many other related issues.

Kate: Yes. And we also have to re-examine some of the assumptions we've made in much of our programming, projects, and research endeavors. After decades of work we have lots of successes but were still losing farmers and farm land, meat consumption hasn't changed, and the effects of climate change are becoming more apparent. We are not addressing the needed complementarity of rural and urban agriculture; we aren't thinking about resiliency and scale enough; I could go on.

Ron: So what kinds of things need to be done?

Kate: The authors of the article have several suggestions. One is to conduct/advocate for many more very detailed site-specific research projects into all the consequences of using agroecological practices compared to conventional. Another is to design and validate research models that do integrate local variability. They suggest that a good deal of this research needs to be transdisciplinary. And in that vein, they also urge advocates to work more with psychologists and anthropologists to learn a lot more about how people think about food. If this doesn't happen the civic and political legitimacy is not going to be built.

There are lots of other strategies and ideas. What these and other similar writings say to me is that it's time to take a really fresh look and how we approach policy efforts around sustainable agriculture and food systems. Probably time to examine a lot of the assumptions we've had and see if they still ring true. And time to look for some other partners. Given the election results in November, it seems to me that new approaches are going to be needed and it makes sense to incorporate what I've just been talking about.