

Mark Ritchie
Narrator

Ron Kroese
Interviewer

November 21, 2016

Mark Ritchie—MR
Ron Kroese—RK

RK: Today is Monday, November 21. We are at the University of Minnesota, Saint Paul campus, where today it is my pleasure to interview Mark Ritchie, a man whose work I've observed and admired for more than 30 years, as he's worked on many fronts to address fair and equitable, sustainable food and farming systems, and more recently, more directly, was involved in the political arena as Minnesota's secretary of state. So, Mark, I know we've got a lot of ground to cover with your amazing career, but what I'd like to do is really start out with you talking about what really motivated you right from the very beginning. Think back when you were just a little boy. I know you were in the South as a real young boy and then moved to Iowa, like I grew up in Iowa. I'd like to just hear what really motivated you to really get very interested in agriculture, later sustainable agriculture, and kind of move through your career.

MR: Well, it was wonderful to get your questions and to get this opportunity to remember. You know, we're in a busy life and busy world, and so I was, coincidentally, and I will say fortunately, but could be unfortunately, I was just home in Georgia with all my cousins for an aunt's funeral, and we went to the farm of my grandparents where I spent many summers, and actually all the cousins, and now ... so we were ... it was an unplanned, large family reunion that was an opportunity to me to then share stories and to remember and to go visit the places. So it really was my life experience gave me kind of an opportunity in that way. But it does have, I'd say, a kind of more deeper origins for me personally, which is that my father was a China marine in the second war, was a marine who had served in China. He came home with very little tiny photographs—I think we can imagine those little box cameras that made the little tiny pictures—of people starving in front of his eyes, and the famines that occurred in the end of the war and many aspects of the Japanese occupation. But it was the thing that motivated his life to come back and to say—I'm going to do something to do whatever I can about that question of people dying from starvation. And he also had the opportunity in the war to become acquainted with some of the evolutions in technology. He was a radar technician and radio technician with the air corps, the marine air corps. And they had that blessing of the GI Bill, and so he went to school in agriculture in Georgia, which is where he had been shipped off during the Depression, where also he met my mother, and then, using the GI Bill, went to Michigan State, where he was part of the team that was developing what we call today electron microscopes, and then went down to Florida, where he was working and Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh, on a Ph.D. and was part of the evolution of that technology in animal disease from detection to prevention. So in that time I was born along the way somewhere, and summers we were down in Georgia at the grandparents' farm, and we were in that world of our community. His life and work, then, moved him toward the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the USDA both had built some large research facilities and was building additional ones, so we eventually ended up, when I was very

young, in Beltsville, Maryland, which was the big USDA research lab. At that time it was fundamentally research. Today it has more of a library. But, anyhow, he had his electron microscope there, and it was in that first generation of research, and they were researching scrapies, which we have now understood the link to mad cow, and, you know, all these things. But they then built a large new lab in Ames, Iowa, and it has a big water tower in [ADL - Animal Disease Lab], and it was interrelated, obviously, but we moved out to Iowa when I was in sixth grade to really be kind of the cutting edge or the first wave of scientists. My father was a first-wave scientist in that big facility and it brought me into a small town that was not Washington, DC, and to a community that is what I consider my hometown, my school, and where I graduated from high school and then went to Iowa State. So this motivation of my dad's was expressed in his work, but also was expressed, I have to say, very dramatically in my little hometown church. Methodist churches, and I think many, January was Mission Sunday. Every Sunday night a missionary or somebody—Dean Freudenberger, who was one of the most important voices for soil, was a speaker some Sunday night when I was maybe in tenth grade at my little tiny church in a little town in Iowa, because he was somehow connected in a church mission—I don't know. So these people had powerful language and imagery and stories, and so this thing became part of who I was, and particularly a focus on hunger, and that being something that had both, of course, a dramatic domestic U.S. focus, but especially international, and we all had the experiences of the famine in Biafra, and all the different things that we talk about. So these had a big impact on me. I ended up going to Iowa State University in biochemistry, biophysics, just like my father. I didn't become as successful as he was in the scientific arena—it was 1968, and there were things in the world that were alive and a lot of things to consider, but it always for me was that there was this question of who on the planet had the ability to find for themselves and their family in the ways that they could—farming or shopping or working or whatever it was—to have good nutrition and to survive well. And this has always been my life motivation, and it has been reflected in everything from the work on infant formula to farming. So there was a deeper piece of this, and it had elements of my own grandparents, who farmed a little tiny farm. But they also manufactured mattresses on the farm. You know, things were more mixed. There just was the notion of kind of industrialized agriculture, and all of that was not necessarily the image that I had. I had other images to work with. But in my college years I had had close friends at Iowa State who migrated to Minneapolis, and I migrated to Des Moines, and when I was there student teaching, I was living with a whole group of student teachers, and we had a big house, and when I would visit my friends here, they said—oh, you have to go with us to the food cooperatives. And so I was a little bit aware of things we used to call food clubs—I don't even remember all the connections, but I remember walking into North Country Coop, so in the old location, and there down the street was Needly Dee and Needly Dum, and the Triangle Building was a warehouse. I'm sure the details are more fuzzy at this stage in life, but in any case it was like—wow! People working together, wow! Cooperatives—wow! Pictures of farmers, and we quickly said—well, you know, we could have a kind of small version of like a food club or whatever in our garage in Des Moines, and we could buy bags of beans and wheat and oatmeal and whatnot and take it down, and so we created our own small Des Moines food coop. But the Minneapolis system was growing; I mean, it was becoming a system. There were relationships being built with young and old farmers in Wisconsin and other parts of Minnesota, and so I was roughly aware of this and was parts of bringing food down to Des Moines and creating a network there, so '71, something like that. And I was trying to finish school, and I had, by then, started to get a teacher's certificate in social studies, which certainly has remained an important part of my

passion. But in that time period, I ended up, after having worked in Alaska for a while, in the San Francisco Bay area, and just kind of imagined that there were going to be food coops kind of like there were in Minneapolis, and people said—oh, yeah, we have them; they're huge—you should see them. I'd think—wow, I can't wait to see these, and they had things that were in a style from the '30s and '40s and '50s—a sort of grown-up, kind of large-scale kind of cooperative supermarket. Interesting. Associated Cooperatives was their warehouse. It was also where I met my wife, that kind of thing. But it wasn't the same as the building up of a cooperative movement, and a cooperative community set of relationships, as I had experienced in the Midwest and Des Moines and in Minneapolis. It was the bakery, you know People's Bakery, all that stuff, and I was looking around with two other friends, one of whom had been living in Minneapolis for a while, and then another who was from Des Moines, so we were all from Iowa State. We ended up finding a house that was a good place to rent, but it came with a store front. Somewhere in that there was the idea that, well, let's put a food coop in here. And in the back it had room for ... we used to have to put in special floors to produce food, and put in a stove, and bake granola. Making granola—not that hard, you know—you have to turn it. Baking bread—it's not that hard. So we were kind of amazed to not find something like we were aware of here, but, in any case, Le Semillas de Vide—Seeds of Life store—was created out of that kind of impulse, and it immediately attracted people who were very wired into their own food world and community. San Francisco had an old farmers market down by the ... it's not where it is now, but kind of down by the Cow Palace, and people began showing up to volunteer and to be part of the store and had a lot of different elements. Some of them became incredibly devoted, and kind of went back to their neighborhoods and started other stores. Some took it to a whole 'nother level, and I can remember when the real early stages of discussions about what was natural food and what was organic food and all of those things that one of the people who had really taken on the work of finding the produce, and that meant farmers market, connecting with farmers, and people would stop by, they would have a truck of apples or something. He became very, very focused on the question of the sort of ripping off of the word natural, and some calling this natural, but in fact not having any real standards or whatever. He—I can remember this very vividly—somehow understood that he needed to go up to Sacramento, which was the state capital, and they needed to lobby for something that was a law—this was really foreign, really foreign—to define natural.

RK: Hmm... Good

MR: Yeah, I guess so! [Chuckles] Sacramento? California Legislature? You know, it's a big state. But it was in the time when other things were really fermenting, so Jerry Brown was somewhere running, and there were people talking about sustainability, so that was the opportunity to then begin thinking a lot more carefully about where did the food come from, and what were the circumstances where that food came from, and, particularly, in California, the farm worker movement was, in particular, a very defined, very vigorous movement. The cannery workers' movement, because, of course, much of the food is processed and packaged, and so the cannery workers were highly organized, had their own newspaper and their own kind of organizing thrust. There were large communes and collectives that were involved in everything from reforestation, which was very big in California because of large fires then required massive things that were sort of beyond my imagination, but also just involved in other things, the production. And by this time, places like University of California, Santa Cruz, had sort of

emerged, because they had their own farm, and then became an organic farm. So this store, Le Semillas de Vide, was able to be part of a growing movement that ultimately was kind of referred to as the Northern California food movement, and the Northern California food system, very quickly because of the model, not just in Minnesota, but around Madison, around Seattle, around the Ozarks, in Massachusetts—all over the country there were growing up systems. The Bay area had its own kind of energy, but Davis, just north of San Francisco, Palo Alto and Menlo Park, Santa Cruz coops began to be formed. Some grew out of some direct, sort of religious affiliation ties—Rainbow Foods, still a huge store in San Francisco, but that came in that time in that same way. There were some merchants and older stores. I remember O's Fine Foods was on the main road in South End. That had just been there for 30 or 40 years, selling things in bulk, putting a focus on high quality that became part of the culture of the values in that larger food coop movement, but it was expressed just in a regular merchant. You know, they had a 50-foot wall of several hundred-pound bags of different kinds of—they called them dals—but lentils, green peas, split peas, you know. So that whole system there had the capacity, then, to actually be a partner with farmers and how farmers were growing. And so at the farmers market in San Francisco it was possible to find those pioneers that had been out in front. For example, Fred Adams comes to mind. Fred Adams was already farming organic oranges and olive oil, and Fred was there every weekend, and he was part of a voice, of talking about how this should be more widely understood, and why it was important for the kids, and that kind of stuff. And Knudsen juices. I remember old man Knudsen saying—we've got to get the kids off of soda pop. This was long before they'd been bought. I mean, this was long, long time ago. So there was a consciousness in the producers and the farmers that was quite advanced about both the mechanisms and the way of producing and the necessity of connecting that to the consumer, and the consumer's interests really being a lot about their well-being. There weren't tons of discussions about how do you set the price and all that kind of thing. It was more like—this is the best way to produce this. I remember the people who produced the organic raisins—and some crops are much more complicated—you know, strawberries—and there are just some things ... but some things you can do if you think through, and, especially, definitions weren't sort of laid out by laws. The law got passed about natural. I believe it was maybe the first of kind of attempts to put some structure, but, in any case, these were opportunities that, for me, were the most important part of my work, and I began to move towards those connections and towards that. We would go and meet—like we were getting black beans, pinto beans and red beans and white beans from the Posey's up in Twin Falls, Idaho, and so we just took a little road trip and met these incredible ... they're three generations, and this is what they've been doing, and they would talk about, you know ... I grew up in a little town in Iowa, Iowa's got a certain kind of farming. Idaho had a different ... northern California ... so for me, these things gave me raw material for trying to understand how that system was working, and that also raised other questions, so, for example, people began focusing on the importance of local. So, what did local mean? Local in California has its own kind of meaning. But they also began focusing on the kind of international aspects. So, for example, things that were grown under very exploitative conditions, and just looking internationally, for example, at sugar plantation and sugar cane production in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. And people would come from worker organizations or the church, especially the Catholic Church, very deeply involved. And you would hear—like wait a minute, I don't want to be part of that system. Or banana production, there are some circumstances, deaths that would occur because of the way that the production process was organized. And other things, like in the moment that Mozambique became free and broke off from the dictatorship in

Portugal. Mozambique was producing cashews, but the U.S. government had a prohibition against importing from Mozambique, but if they went to Vancouver, then they could come around it. So the concept of thinking consciously about the source, which is not always simply the way in which it was produced. That's important, but it had other elements in terms of its nature in a global system opened up my eyes to trying to think about more consciously what was my role in that and what could I do if I was working in a cheese company or we had a chicken farm or an egg farm. How do you raise those chickens for those eggs, and what do you do—a loose, kind of wild dog gets into your chicken barn—what are you going to do? It just raised a lot of other questions about how do we think about the connection what we put on the table in the morning and where did it start the year before or twenty years before? So I became more and more interested in the policy part, especially because, in the case of eggs, we were accidental. There was a wonderful farm that produced what they called fertile eggs, brown fertile eggs. I don't believe ... yes, I'm pretty certain there wasn't the organic certification or any of that at this time. And they were in Morgan Hill, and they were a wonderful family, the Andersons, Anderson Farms, Anderson Eggs. And I remember when Mr. Anderson, who was older—we were, you know, twenties. [Chuckles] And I remember he came in, delivering these cases and cases and cases of eggs, and what do you do, driving the truck. I remember he was red-faced, and he said—oh, you know, the price of eggs has gone down so much we had to lay off the drivers. Oh, man, so this happened for maybe three weeks, I think, and I think on the fourth week of this—so this is hard to remember, precisely, but I believe he had a heart attack on his way back home and died. And so his wife, widow, Betty Anderson, I think, and her sister all of a sudden had this whole thing, because it had changed in the economics and he had to take on an additional job and he was not young and not ... so this happened, this was kind of strong for me. And they were just going to liquidate, and the chickens were going to go to Campbell's, and we kind of like—wait a minute, wait a minute! And they had their brown chickens on the ground in Morgan Hill, and they had their White Leghorns out by Modesto, in kind of a more modern place. And we bought ... I don't remember the circumstances of the purchase, but we bought the right to the name, and the right to the kind of older-fashioned barns in Morgan Hill, and we spent a very long night with an eclipse of the moon, grabbing ten chickens by feet, putting them into the boxes, loading them on the truck, and driving them from Modesto up to Morgan Hill, and we, then, had a chicken, an egg farm, that we ran for a number of years until Morgan Hill ran out of water. So in that context, I began asking more questions—well, what had happened? And what had happened was every once in a while there would be a flood of what was called breakers, which is eggs that are out of shells in a big tub, just kind of flooding in across international borders, in this case was from Canada and from other places, that would deep-six the domestic price, in particular because these eggs, there were roosters in the mix, because they wanted the eggs to be fertile, and all of these things, essentially the price would go up and down, and it would create chaos in the market, and this same thing happened when we had this chicken farm. We were not immune from these international forces, and I began to be aware of how much the policy of how you organize international commerce, in particular, affected the ability of farmers to, including myself in this chicken egg operation, to do the right thing, to produce in the way that was humane, that was sustainable, that was respectful, that, if you had no control over the policies, your desires, your belief system, your personal religious, personal ethical values might be crushed in the process. And I'd go, oh man, I've got to think about this, and about that time, farmers began organizing around the country in what was eventually to become called the American Agriculture Movement, but they were raising questions about the whole system and a

group of almond farmers that I was buying almonds from, up by Davis, so in the town of Arbuckle, I think, had me up for a meeting, and they kind of walked through what was this thing called a farm bill? And what was this thing called federal policy? And what were these things, and what were the '30s like, and what happened when there was a depression, and they were old enough, some, to really be able to tell the whole story, and then I go—whoa. So my focus, which had been on the food side, the consumer side, and linking to the farmers, increasingly moved to my attention to the policy side, to what were these laws and these different rules and regulations. So having a law or regulation that helped define natural—oh, yeah, that's a law, that's policy, oh, that's interesting. Oh, I'd better rewind the video tape and remember what that whole conversation was about, because I had not really been thinking about it. And so I began to put more attention into that, and with some other people who were also thinking about those kinds of things, we created an organization called Earth Work, and eventually brought in another entity that had sort of been around for a while called Center for Rural Studies, which grew out of an earlier conference in the early '70s on land reform, the first national conference on land reform. We began self-consciously doing public education, doing a film series that talked about farm worker issues and water pollution issues, and international trade issues. We had kind of an education center, or kind of a public center, and focusing more on policy. So this began to change my work and life responsibilities from getting up at four in the morning and going and getting the soy milk and the tofu and making sure it got to the stores or whatever, to thinking about and being engaged in the question of policies per se around the issues. And some words and some notions were being articulated. About this time Frances Moore Lappe and Joe Collins, her co-author, and others had moved to the Bay Area, and we were all kind of interwoven in that way. Other people were giving expression in the—I wouldn't say intellectual, but in the more educational, written... people like George Ballas and others were creating posters and films, some being Oscar quality around farm issues and land and water issues. These things were happening in a very fertile ground, where my path came out of a real kind of focus in the food part, but there was a much larger conversation going on, and so I was the beneficiary of that very fertile ground.

So this opportunity to more deeply consider what does it mean to say you want to, in your life, do something about world hunger? Just something you can say in high school, especially after a nice, rousing Sunday night at church, where you get all the pictures and you're gonna freak out. Anyhow, it began to give some definition to that in a way that also touched me in the things I was able to do. And so it made it possible for me to say that is an honorable and potentially legitimate thing for me to say—I'm going to focus on the policy side of this as something that's applicable to that.

About that time a little baby came along that my wife and I adopted, and it was time to be back in the Midwest for a variety of reasons, and I came here on a beautiful, bright blue sky August with big white clouds, and convinced her that we shouldn't go back to the East Coast, which was her home, we should come here. But when I got here it was, of course, knowing that in this region there had been built a very sustained system which we enjoy today still. I would say in some other parts of the country, in some other cities and regions, the food coop movement and interconnections with the producers had not been as sustained as western Wisconsin, I mean the Twin Cities. So I was able to come back and move into South Minneapolis and walk right into the coop and just start buying kind of the same food.

RK: What year was that?

MR: So we moved back in '81. I had worked in the cooperative warehouse, and so we had a lot of direct purchasing together with what before was People's Warehouse and then Dance Warehouse here and in Madison, getting cheese. For a while I worked in our cheese company, with the cheese company, and cheese shipments from here and sending pasta back, and so I had a lot of contact through the trucking system—Dick Freeman Trucking was the name of the two young men who really did a lot of that trucking. So I was pretty familiar, and there were other things going on here, so for me, coming back here, spending the first couple years, because my wife, Nancy, went back to school and stuff, I was working in advertising around agriculture—that was interesting. But then when she finished school then I was recruited and able to go to Minnesota Department of Agriculture with Anne Kanten and then Jim Nichols and really some of the ...

RK: That was under Perpich, was it?

MR: Yeah. And, you know, it was a bit simultaneous to the crisis, so it was ... there were a lot of pieces of this, but my responsibility was trade policy, which, in those days the trade office was inside the Department of Agriculture, it was the, I'd say, the notion that it was largely corn and soybeans. Of course, it never has been that exclusively, but anyhow that was the idea. And trade policy being one aspect of international policy, because there's also food aid and a lot of things, but it was certainly the case that I had never considered the way that trade policy fit into a kind of policy hierarchy, but I was able to maybe see it a little more closely. For instance, a county might come up with some rule or regulation to protect its land or its water, or watershed, and somebody may not like that, and that somebody might go down to the state capital and get the legislature to overturn whatever that county was trying to do. And I saw that. Some states would take some action to support labeling or support farmers or support water quality protection. We've had a lot of focus on our Minnesota River, Governor Carlson, make it swimmable, fishable—you know, blah, blah, blah. And sometimes people who didn't like those efforts would run off to Washington and get somebody in Washington, some agency or some legislator, you know, to overturn, to pre-empt. And then I began realizing that sometimes when things were being done at the national level, that people didn't like, then they had this thing called trade negotiations, which are all done in secret, and they come back to Congress not as is described in the Constitution, but it comes back with these very fast-track rules so that you can't, you know ... so they're done in secret, and they come back with these special rules, and they were using those to overturn laws about content, local content, sustainability matters, and even things about safety, safety regulations for nuclear power plants and stuff like that. So I became very early aware that things that we were trying to do in agriculture, particularly around the economics of sustaining small-scale family farm agriculture, were viewed as threats by some people, and they were using another level of policy making that was unfamiliar to me, but the process was familiar to me, and I began to see I had to get to know and understand that better, and I had the possibility of creating relationships with others in other countries who were also worried about that. In the course of gathering with them and trying to figure out about this thing that seemed to threaten us, we began to see that, oh, yeah, but there's also great things going on. Shouldn't we go visit? And

we went on that trip to AURI (Agricultural Utilization Research Institute). Did we see the robotic milker at the organic farm on that ... Am I remembering that...?

RK: I think so.

MR: It just seemed so like space-age, right? [Chuckles]

RK: Yes, yes.

MR: But that experience of seeing something that was wrong and trying to do something about it, and in the course of that also discovering—oh, well there's also these other things that can come out of those relationships that was, of course, crucial, because the sustainable agriculture movement, which has one set of elements which are against or in opposition to or in reaction to bad things, gets alongside of ... all these bluebirds—where did they come from? And all of that. And then these wonderful people and then the wonderful experience of the farmers market and going in ... and so this has been my experience in the policy world in addition to in the real world or the physical world or the food world. And so this gave me a different kind of personal sustainability. That you can't just do it 40, 50, 60 years in oppositional mode. I mean, there's very important things that need to be done over time. But you have to have built into that understanding little and large victories and small and deep relationships and experiences that say—oh, there's the path forward; there's another way. The ability to use the genius and ingenuity and devotion of people all over the planet is kind of a wonderful thing that can maybe get lost sometimes, but if you can come back to it. And people come to visit here and they want to see, and then you forget that you don't spend time enough bragging. You go—oh, yeah, you want to come see Mill City Market or let's go down to Sever's. You know Sever? I mean, you have the other aspect of when people come to visit you, then you stop and remember and appreciate, and then maybe even brag, but probably not, but you do show people ... it's a funny thing—I say Minnesotans don't like to brag, but they like to show you the back forty, you know what I mean—or their garden, you know, whatever it is.

RK: And those are things that nurture you, that keep you going. I mean, really, as...

MR: When I think about the movement here in our region, from the community potlucks to how The Wedge, which is a pretty good-size operation builds inside ... we know this even as we get bigger, and some things get more complicated or more complex or something like that. And so being able to connect this, for me, became part of the broader conversation the more I understood about the role of federal policy in particular. What we sometimes call the farm bill, it's kind of a bunch of stuff, but kind of that. And seeing how, in a sense, like the League of Women Voters got organized and helped advocate for certain things very important to the society, but also to women. The League of Conservationists got well organized and could advocate the ... you name it, people get organized to advocate, and that is the way we do things, that's the world we have here, and so some of us put together and began organizing the League of Rural Voters to kind of raise the voice, because just from a strict population point of view, we're partly a representative democracy and partly a not-representative democracy, but to the extent that it's by numbers of people, you've got to have a higher voice if you're going to be smaller people. So that experience was very important to me from a kind of organizing perspective, but it also brought

me in contact with other people concerned about just elections in general, and about the security of elections, and about how elections function. In 2000 and 2002 and in that general time-frame, there was a lot of effort to raise certain issues to the level of saying, you know, it matters what they do in Congress. You may hate them, you may not like the whole idea or whatever, but, you know, it matters. That became a kind of organizing focus, and I was asked by a consortium of non-partisan voter registration and voter turnout kind of organizations if I would take kind of a sabbatical from my work, which was working at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, and we had started Peace Coffee, and we were working on fair trade. What are good trade rules? Well, here's good trade rules. And so it was an exciting time, building a coffee company and all that stuff. But I agreed, and I took some time off, and I helped, coordinated this national effort. But what I did not anticipate or did not understand going into it was that I would get very concerned about the democracy itself. And 2004 there was a lot of trouble in the election, and, of course, 2000 in Florida there was a lot of trouble in the election, and in particular I know that I had a kind of a view—well, other people have those problems, and look how bad, how terrible that is in Florida. But in my own work I realized that the way our democracy was functioning in Minnesota did not meet my expectation and, I think, many people's expectation for transparency and authenticity. It was just like—wait a minute, here, something's going on here. Kind of people fooling with who got to vote and how hard they make it to vote and all of this stuff. Of course, Minnesota's always been kind of on the front edge, at least since the '70s, when we moved to same-day registration and things that were about encouraging people. So we were the first state to approve the Constitutional amendment to make the voting age 18. We've had this. But I came to realize that it wasn't just in Florida or Ohio or wherever, but that there was issues here, and that in my understanding that the policy really mattered. The more I hung around policy-makers, people who that was their job, elected or appointed, they would always finish that thought by saying—yeah, but people make the policies, and I realized that elections chose, elections are the ways that we select who are those people that make those policies that make it either possible or not possible for me to raise eggs or chickens the way I think is proper. Boom. And so all of a sudden it's like—wait a minute here—if this system of democracy—and I'm using that word kind of broadly, but kind of the election system narrow, just to take one piece of that—is being manipulated or isn't functioning well or is broken or isn't trusted—I mean there is all kinds of things that are different, but if they add up to not working well, then the people chosen to make the policies won't represent the best and brightest, maybe the opposite. Or they won't feel the element, because so often it is said, and there is an element of truth but not lying, it's said, but there's a kind of notion—well, young people don't vote. And so you hear a lot more discussion about hearing aids and wheel chairs and old people stuff, because politicians running for office—and I have spent a lot of time in that world, recently—think, well, young people don't vote, so I don't have to ... now, if they think rural people don't vote, if they think people with disabilities can't get to the polls, well pretty soon you're no longer empathetic or thinking about young people or the next generation, or people with disabilities, because ... da, da, da. So in that way, I realized that there was a crisis in the democracy that had a very direct impact on how and who got chosen to be a policy-maker, who then impacted what were the policies which then impacted farming, sustainable agriculture, and food and people in hunger in this country and all over the world, so that if I really wanted to do something about world hunger and about how we produce and how we distribute it, I needed to take some time and think about what was my responsibility.

And, of course, in the middle of all of this was the example, the exemplary example, of Paul Wellstone entering from the background of an organizer, particularly around farm issues that I was together with him on, into elected politics, kind of confronting us with the question—what is your proper role? What should you be doing? And with his tragic death, being confronted with that just much more directly. And so the question of taking a path that was different or sailing aside for a moment work that was really what we would call issue-specific work—it's the same, kind of, you know—food and ag—and focusing on the democracy in a very particular way, which was to run for the office that had responsibility for some aspects of the democracy, all of a sudden became something I had to think about very carefully, because I was being confronted with the notion that there was a crisis in our democracy and that whatever else I might want was affected by that. And I spent quite a bit of time after that election in '04 just complaining and kvetching, and da, da, da, and finally my wife, Nancy, said—are you going to do something? Are you just going to complain? What are you ... cut it out! But she also sent me over a little note that said—so there's this thing called Camp Wellstone, which was named after Paul and Sheila Wellstone, and run by part of his team or his staff, and they have a weekend with a kind of a boot camp—I think they used the word boot camp—that was for people who were thinking about or considering running for office, and my wife said we should go together, we should go think about this, talk about this.

And so on a very cold weekend in the end of January of 2005, Nancy and I went over to Saint Paul to the Carpenter's Hall, and there was a whole group of people, and so there were different tracks. There were sort of community organizing and there was campaign management, and there was candidates, and I went to the candidate one. But when they asked who here is going to run for office, maybe half of the people raised their hand and half of us did not, because this was exploratory. But there were people there like Tim Walz and Jeremy Kalin and others who ... Andrew Borene. And so in that weekend of getting a kind of a cold shower, like—hey, have you thought about the family budget, or have you thought about this, you know, all that compressed into one, I understood that there was a whole group of people who were like me. This was kind of a new idea, and something was happening that motivated us that came out of our other experience, and that we should all jump in together. So a whole group of us kind of decided, not because we sat in a circle and did, but kind of all said it, and then have supported each other all these years. And so my decision to set aside for the moment issue-specific work and to focus on the democracy which I believed was in trouble, and had a direct impact on the way that people were chosen and stuff meant that I had to, first, run for office within a political party, win the nomination, and then I had to run for office within the broader society. And so I made that choice and I was successful in the path of running within my party.

RK: 2008, you said?

MR: 2006. And I thought I kind of knew my state, but it turned out I kind of knew where I lived, Minneapolis, and I knew the corn and soybean areas. But did I know the rest? No. But did I have to learn the rest, yes. And so for the next ten years, roughly two years of running and eight years of term, then I had this incredible opportunity to come to know my state deeper, to be responsible for registering all the companies and corporations, so really having a kind of a sense of where the economy was going, and it also had some very difficult times—'08, '09, you know, that kind of thing. And those things came alongside of the more public part of that job—the

elections being a critical factor in basically a very decentralized, locally run, but statewide coordinated, system. It did make me ultimately understand that the democracy has to be as healthy as possible to then have a shot at the process of which good people are bought into decision making. Because, especially if you want good people and the system is bad or rotten or it's rigged, people putting up barriers that make sure young people can't vote—there's all kinds of stuff out there—then good people won't feel encouraged or they'll feel discouraged, or they won't be successful, and so then we'll have low-quality people making policies, and then we're lobbying them and so just my understanding of the importance of making sure the democracy is strong and the system is open and people are encouraged, including to run for office, which was Paul Wellstone's genius, just saying good people have to run. So in that way, that ten years was a long time to be away from my work in agriculture, but it was the right thing to do, and it also gave me a kind of understanding, because we have different capacities.

So I've had this incredible opportunity in the last couple years because there was this endowed chair in sustainable agriculture that was something I could connect to and could get reintegrated—you know, ten years is a long time to not be staying on top of all the literature, and the movement has kept growing and expanding in exciting ways, and next generations. But it was a very good thing for me to do, and it had some very unusual other elements, for example, our government, the State Department and others, brings a lot of delegations from other countries, and they would want to come meet the secretary of state, because they would have this sort of national idea. They would joke—you don't look like Condoleezza Rice—there were jokes about it. But kind of any country, kind of any delegation—because they would have different names, like journalists, whatever—but most everybody, if I could somehow get the conversation slightly into food and agriculture, they all lit up, because they were all interested. I mean, no matter what country or where ... and so then we'd like get down! And they would like all in their evaluations saying, I'd get like five stars, because, in fact, this was what I was interested in, and it was really what they were interested in, and I ended up being at the War College, and part of the War College part of the time was at Gettysburg, and part of the time at Gettysburg I went over to Eisenhower's farm. And in the little gift shop, kind of educational thing, there was a movie, and it was Walter Cronkite's movie, or special, on the night that Eisenhower died—it was a compilation of, I think, 17 interviews. But anyhow, one of the interviews was asking—why do you have this farm here? It said, you know—so this is Eisenhower saying—you know, I have torn up so much of this earth in my life, I found this scrubby, run-down, soil-eroded, ravaged thing, and I'm going to make this better. I'm going to make this piece of earth better, because I have destroyed so much. And so that was kind of cool. Anyway, it's verdant and beautiful, right? But he said—but really, what I knew and I was very pleased to find out that I was correct in my assumption, that before—this was still while he was in office he had this place—world leaders would want to visit with him, and he would say—well, come up to my farm. And so they would go and see the Angus, and they would go out to the fields, and these emirs and presidents and prime ministers and whatever name, dictator this and that, whatever...

RK: Khrushchev...

MR: ... were like—really? And so he said in this little film, this was the beginning of real diplomacy, because you could walk this farm and see these cattle and talk about raising cattle, and everybody was really interested and had their own place, or whatever. And he said this was

one of my secrets for diplomacy. So that experience of seeing Eisenhower talk about this in the context of why he wanted to restore a piece of land, and what was the human connection that then created—diplomacy is kind of a funny word, but better openness in relations that then allowed him to do his job of trying to avoid another ... because he was totally devoted to how to never have another world war. So this was in everything he did. That this farm, raising food, raising livestock and things was the core to our most successful general and president ever, and it just like was affirmed that this central interest, what my father had devoted his life to and I had devoted much of my life to, was interconnected to many other things. If the connectivity can be remembered, appreciated, and then you find a way to then engage. Yes, the societies are becoming more urbanized, certainly, but then people get chickens. Or they get the one acre. Or in Europe they get the little garden plots, or the grandparents, you know, whatever it is. Minnesotans are the same, are the same ... from Burundi or wherever. So for me the notion that these things are compatible, not just in the sense of you can divide up your life or your hours of your day so you days of the week, and that kind of thing, and garden on the weekend or whatever, they are compatible at a different, more fundamental human level. And so if we make farming and food only something that is giant and out of the imagination, or negative imagination, if we make the treatment of animals so horrific and the treatment of the people doing the work so horrific that people are like this, then the open heart that Eisenhower described, that I experienced, that we all experience when we go to the farmers market and we try that cheese, you know, we can ruin one of homo sapiens' most important mechanisms of empathy and relationship and coexistence in an increasingly complex and crowded world, if we're not careful about how we do agriculture and how we think about food and the animals that help us provide food, and the people on the land. We can cut off one of the most important things. And certainly, healing and medical and there are some other things that connect us, but there is nothing like the land, the animals, and the food that is as universal, still as universal, and we have done things that have diminished its capacity. And I feel like we've been on a good pendulum swing to restore that in the past few decades. We went in—I can't remember what year, but we went and looked at land and soil things in Europe, and you could see that other people have come to some similar—like, hey, we've got to get a hold of this thing. We as a nation did not experience the kind of famine that, say, that Europe did after the war, or that Japan or China, you know, so there were certain things that were in the survival, pure survival side of this, that, I think, also created a different kind of empathy and a more deeper appreciation of the farmers and that kind of thing. It just wasn't our national experience, because we were so protected. But, in any case, it's still the empathy thing was totally there.

RK: And I think I see where you're kind of going, and I'd like to go there, and that's where your work around the World's Fair coming up.

MR: Yeah.

RK: I will just say right now, too, that I also feel a Part II coming back, coming up sometime, that we're going to have to get together again, because I want to talk to you ... I would like to hear about the Franken campaign and what you did there.

MR: [Chuckles] OK, that's Part II.

RK: When you were secretary of state.

MR: And I will tease that up by talking about the World's Fair.

RK: OK, and then I want to talk more about the time at IATP (Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy) and some of the policy stuff, and some of the, even the issues where we got even somewhat entangled sometimes around parity versus the stewardship and all of that.

MR: Yeah, yeah, yeah—so that's Part II.

RK: So that will be Part II. But let's go on with your life.

MR: Yeah, because one of the things about being secretary of state and having people come to my office, whatever, is that I really like bragging about Minnesota, and bragging about Iowa, too—you know I'm from Iowa. And Georgia—bragging about Georgia. It's a little more difficult up here, but my wife said—and I had some other opportunities, because as secretary of state I sat on the board on the historical society, which was like heaven to me, you know, a high school history ... There were certain things I'd get to do, to brag, you know. But she would say—you're really going to miss that part of it. So anyhow I hadn't taken that, necessarily, in, but she was right. It came with the job, but also running for office, it's part of the job, and notwithstanding the most recent election where negativism came to dominate, generally speaking, Minnesotans, most people are interested in hearing about what we're doing successfully, and then how can we make it better. And Minnesotans, I think, have these two qualities—proud of what we've inherited and what we've done, and aware that we have a responsibility going forward and what are we going to do. So anyhow, when I was, knew that I was only going to serve only two terms, so that was the agreement at home, and that I needed to announce pretty early, because secretary of state's race is statewide, and there's a very, very low budget, so you can't really do statewide advertising and stuff, so you have to go out and shake every person's hand in the state, which sounds a little crazy, but it mostly means you've got to get out early. So I needed to announce early, so that ... you're not well-known, nobody knows your name, you know, that kind of thing. So anyhow, I announced a couple years out, which is kind of what ... and I had, myself, announced that I was running, so I knew that was kind of right. But anyhow, one of the things that happened right away was I got a call from a few people in Saint Paul who had been very active in the organization of what we call the Festival of Nations. Minnesota has this thing—it's almost a hundred years old, and it celebrates the 80 or 90 different communities or peoples—from Finland or from the Kurdish—all these different people. So anyhow they knew that this was really interesting, and people come from Indiana, busloads of school kids come up here. So it was quite an interesting conversation, but the reason they wanted to talk to me was that there had been, maybe in the year before this conversation took place, a kind of reemergence of the question of World's Fairs for the United States. Where did they go, or do they still have ... and all of a sudden people are talking about it. A young leader in Houston, Texas had showed up in the *Wall Street Journal*, banging on the State Department, saying—listen, we want to have a World's Fair in Houston. You guys at the State Department, you're in our way, you're creating this difficulty, you make it impossible, blah, blah, blah. So anyhow, they wanted to know if I would be interested in working with them on a committee to try to bring the World's Fair to Minnesota. And the first thing, we go—oh, yeah—1964. My folks packed us up from our Little

House on the Prairie, me and my three brothers, went out to Long Island, camped on the shore there, and went into this World's Fair. And I remember—oh, my God, they have driverless cars and they have video phones. I was 12, and I was thinking, man, maybe I ought to buckle down, and maybe I ought to get part of this future. I mean, it had a big impact on me, so now like all of a sudden I like—oh, my God. I remember what an impact.

RK: I had the same thing with the Seattle World's Fair.

MR: Exactly! So you know, so it's like—well, that's a good idea. Maybe I should get myself in gear. So I came home and in four years from then I was at Iowa State in bio-chemistry. I got moved there. But the other thing that happened was I said to them—I'm too old to just kind of chase stuff—is this possible? And they said—well, we don't know for sure, but you could find out, because there's an international body and they're in Paris, and blah, blah, blah. And it just turned out I had been asked by the US embassy in Finland to do a series of speeches to chambers of commerce, kind of in rural Finland and stuff like that, so it was going to be in Europe, and I could take a day. And it turned out I went over to the headquarters and had a very interesting conversation where it turned out that the head person was from Spain, was very interested if I knew Ricky Rubio, and he proceeded to tell me that Ricky Rubio, when he had left Spain had broken the hearts of all the girls of Spain, and I heard this kind of story. And when he came to the U.S. he disappointed everybody in Spain, he didn't play basketball in Spain and he wanted to play in the U.S. But he didn't go to L.A. or Miami or the Celtics, he came to Minnesota. And so I wasn't really sure, because people watch the weather channel, and they have their impression. But, he said, when Ricky got here, Minnesota, back home in Spain and all the social media, and all those interviews were like—Minnesota's the most beautiful place in the world, the most beautiful place to raise your kids and play basketball. And he said—you don't have to sell us on Minnesota—Ricky sold us on Minnesota.

RK: Really?

MR: Yeah. And so I came back saying—so who we are as a people, and people who've been ... for whatever reason, come here—and, of course, we know we always have to lure people here—become our ambassadors and that impression and that image in that way is the fundamental thing that you need to be able to have a shot at doing this. We could do this if we want to do it here. If we want to do it in Minnesota, we have fertile soil and ambassadors of all kinds and every place. It's also true that there's millions of Minnesotans all over the planet, every time you turn around, wherever it is. So I came home and I said, OK, I'm willing to try this. Can we put together what it would need, and I went and asked a few people—Marilyn Carlson Nelson and Vice President Mondale and Arne Carlson, would they lend their names to an advisory committee and all this kind of stuff. So once we got some traction, then we said, well then, what is it? How do you do it? Well, gee, that's a good question. Hey, there's one coming up, because they happen every couple years. It's in Milan, Italy. Oh. Oh, it's on food! It's on world hunger! It's on feeding the planet. Well, what do you know, what do you know? [Chuckles] Italy—ooh, like. And so I realized that, notwithstanding that this was my passion and love, but if you were going to get some Minnesotans actually interested and then drag them to one of these so they can see what it is, having it in Italy on food was about as good as you were going to get. And in fact I made a proposal to the council, the board for the MISA (Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture)

endowed chair, that there were opportunities of linking the student community, the entire university community and the broader community, to the Milan World's Fair, because some of the most advanced thinking about sustainable and all that was going to be on display. In the midst of so many other things. And we were actually able to put together four delegations. And, interestingly enough, bipartisan and involving people ... Kurt Daudt and Paul Thissen, led different delegations. Tom Emmer and the others and Betty McCollum. And so this whole way of connecting to that then transformed this from being this kind of—could we do this? Well, we could do this. Well, what is it? Well, Milan was one way to see it and there were very important lessons. For example, Milan in a way was, for those of us, I would say, more deeply ... if you were a real foodie you could just go crazy, but if you were looking for a coherent message, if you got 150 companies and countries doing their own thing in their own pavilion, the coherence is really difficult to get to. In some instances, like United Arab Emirates, they are focused on water and drought, and what the world is going to ... and why countries who are drought and water short have built the expertise and the knowledge that it is necessary and useful for a world that's in a climate ... I mean that kind of special gem was there. But then how do you make coherence? So, in other words, we got the opportunity because Milan did this to then really see what was possible. We took delegations of people who were skeptical and then they go—wow! Like the visitors' bureaus, the convention bureaus, and, you know, that kind of thing. We took politicians of different parties. So out of those we came back with enough energy and juice to then go the next level. It's like, well, so we're not part of this international body for the moment, but there are procedures from the '80s. What do we actually do when we suddenly realize that we didn't actually know, but we began to study, and we understood that we had to go through the Department of Commerce first. So, OK, that's interesting. If you want to host one in the U.S. you start with the Department of Commerce. That turned out to be very good and very important. Secretary Pritzker is from Chicago; Chicago has done important World's Fairs. The Commerce Department likes to do things—this is in contrast to some departments of the government that don't like to do things. We kept pushing and pushing and pushing. And when we began the process, the first thing on the table was what should be the theme. I was thinking any kind of food and agriculture. People at Ecolab wanted water—you know, 10,000 lakes and Lake Superior and all that kind of stuff. Marilyn Carlson Nelson wrote, filmed herself speaking this and put on YouTube the argument that it should be healthy people, healthy planet—wellness and well-being for all, that it should be an all-encompassing theme, because food and diet really mattered, and clean water and clean air and protecting the soil really mattered. Mental health and spiritual health. So that step of choosing that theme then propelled us, because then it gave us the opportunity to then connect with all kinds of people who the notion of healing the land, healing the fissures in our societies, healing as the healing arts, you know. Healing, but healing, mental health, spiritual ... it just kind of unfolded and it gave us the capacity to, then, attract enough people to create the possibility of actually producing the first step, which was this application, this big, 300-and-some page big, fat thing, which addressed 15 exhibits that are detailed in law, and we gave that to the Department of Commerce people in the first week of September, and on Thursday and Friday of last week, with two days' notice, their four top lawyers came to do a site visit, and we were able to gather in Saint Paul, Minneapolis, and Bloomington people to talk to them. And I realized it was that crowd that went to Milan. Actually, in the middle of this—Minneapolis has a sister city relationship with Tours, France. Barb Johnson, the head of the city council, Melvin Tennant, the head of the convention bureau, and other people were going to Tours. Melvin had gone to Milan, and I told him about the Ricky Rubio thing, so they got jerseys

and hats and then they went to the international headquarters. The director general, he has the jersey on with a smile, you know how it is. So I had a little reunion with all those people who kind of took a risk. OK, going to Milan's not a big risk, but you know, it was kind of like some took flak. Kurt Daudt took flak when ... you know, that kind of thing. But they were able to hear really amazing questions, kind of deep—how are you going to do this?—from really serious people, who took them kind of serious, because they took the opportunity serious, and sent these four people from Commerce away with a very amazing impression of our region. None of them had ever been here before, so that was really, for me, kind of hmm, which is kind of the point, you know. But out of that process they will, in this next week, I believe, send the recommendations from Secretary Pritzker that they're preparing to President Obama, saying—you should recognize—that's the word they use—Minnesota's bid, and you should instruct the State Department to submit Minnesota's letter of candidacy, just a little short thing, to this international body over in Paris by December 15. And if that happens—that's the drop-dead date, so there's no fussing on that—but if that does happen, and, of course, Washington is in...

RK: Yeah.

MR: Yeah, but if that happens, we are 90 percent of the way there with the opportunity, in a few years, to invite and host 12 million people, most of whom, of course, from the ... a day's drive. But in how we think about healing, and how we think about health and wellness, and how we think about food as medicine, and other things. And when you open the newspaper and you just look through what are people talking about and what are they doing, then you go, oh, six-and-a-half years from now ... not the science fiction part of this, but the kind of cutting edge part of this, with the precision and all this kind of stuff, we have the opportunity to not just showcase what we do, to learn from the rest of the planet and to demonstrate that many of us here in this country are very welcoming, and this has been the case for a hundred and some years, and it's the case today and it will be the case going forward. Kind of representing in all aspects of this our ... we'll never be a big city, but we are already a global city. This is another way to be more deeply global, and that has the advantage of having a kind of how we interpret global. If we just want trade policies that let anybody in the world just kind of run over things, dump their eggs or no, we're thinking about things here. Is it wrong to favor your neighbor? Just because it violates some theory from some 17th Century Scottish whatever? Or is this part of what making community is. You know, these kind of questions. So we, today, that team, reported to Secretary Pritzker. She then called. Marilyn Carlson Nelson, our co-chair, and I was in on that conversation, and then she talked to our governor, and so these elements of closure to the crazy idea that these folks in Saint Paul had about, well, shouldn't we try to do this, and my memories of being there in '64, and how it affected me as a kid, so to speak, are unfolding in a pretty sophisticated way, because we made such great relations with our friends in Italy, who organized, and they are incredibly excited we may do this, and they could help, because they've really learned a bunch of stuff. That food world in Italy is at a whole 'nother level, and so I keep thinking—oh, this will be fun at a different kind of level. But we're trying to get through December 15, and then if we do, there would be a big crowd here, and there's a lot of fun ideas, too. So anyhow, that aspect of this has been interesting because I've been able to get incredible help from Senator Coleman, Governor Pawlenty, Tom Emmer, who is our lead, and from Governor Dayton and Betty McCollum and Al Franken and Amy Klobuchar and Tim Wahls and Erik Paulsen and Kurt Daudt, Paul Thissen and others. So there's an element of this which is

about the recognition that we have to do things to get people to come here, and that we have a lot to share.

RK: We have to do them together.

MR: Yeah. And so it's been quite healing, quite fun, quite remarkable in different ways to push this thing forward in the context and ... there's all kinds of stories, but just getting very specific help. What can I do to help, you know. And when I run into ... I was sitting in ... and Senator Coleman saw me and he came back—what can I do to help here? And Pawlenty has pulled a couple really important intersections where he's ... we have certain chairmen we have to work with and stuff like that, and Tom Emmer's the lead. Yeah, he was on Foreign Affairs and now a different committee, but he's still... But these are aspects of this particular thing that make it ... two years ago appropriate and interesting and useful, but over the next two, four, six years, really important. And so that's a whole 'nother aspect of it. Kurt Daudt found me, and early on I was talking to the Timberwolves, because part of this is that we have these incredible sports things, and they are focusing on youth and obesity. I mean, the connections are incredible. But anyhow, he said—I'm really, really interested in this; I want to know how I can help, etc. etc. And he said—if we do a good job of this, then we could have the possibility someday of potentially bidding on a winter Olympics. The notion is that more and more of these mega-events are going to be in Latin America or in China or in Asia or Middle East or wherever. There will be fewer and fewer in North America and Europe, just because the world is ... so if we don't jump...

I said, you know, that's after I'm dead and gone, but that is visionary, that is out in the future, that's thinking about something else, and it's thinking about the importance of the steps that we take, and to have some of the younger leaders having visionary parts of what their leadership includes, and then taking practical steps—that's what Minnesota needs. I mean, that's what any society needs, but you know there is the kind of kvetching you hear—well, we had all these great people who built us this incredible state, and then we've all kind of lost ... I don't know, you do hear that. So, there is an aspect of this which creates an aspirational component. So a group of Millennials, young professionals that work in like Covidien and Medtronic and the Kidney Foundation who are interested in the World's Fair. But they're interested in what they could do as Millennials as part of the process, and the idea they came up with was building a statewide campaign to eliminate Type II diabetes by the summer of 2023. So this is possible? This is ambitious! Their reason is that diabetes is going to bankrupt their generation. They knew the numbers. One of them worked at the Kidney Foundation; I mean, they have ... and it is an alarming thing, and among veterans, anyhow ... but it was the kind of thing I go—oh, when you have something out there, and people get excited, then they can think about aspiration, or they can think about—oh, the in-laws are coming, let's get this place cleaned up here. We got this disparities issue that is significant at a profound level—are we going to tackle this because we're going to have twelve million people or whatever is the number that come and all that? What are the things about whatever it is? Having something that creates the opportunity for aspirational thinking does feel like Minnesotans want that now. So that's been my experience with it so far.

RK: Wonderful. Well, I really hope it happens, and you've done a lot...

MR: Me, too.

RK: You've done a wonderful job today of taking us through your life in these meaningful jobs you've had along the way. Like I said a little while ago, I really would like to dive back, sometime.

MR: Let's do it.

RK: We'll do another one where we'll dive back and we'll pick up from here.

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