

**Mark Winne**  
**Narrator**

**Ron Kroese**  
**Interviewer**

**February 21, 2017**

**Mark Winne—MW**  
**Ron Kroese—RK**

**RK:** This is Ron Kroese. Today is February 21, 2017. Videographer Jackie Monroe and I are in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where I am about to have a conversation with Mark Winne, renowned lifelong advocate for policies to advance equitable and sustainable food systems in the United States and throughout the planet. Hi, Mark—good to see you.

**MW:** Hi, Ron—welcome to Santa Fe.

**RK:** Thank you. Well, I like to start these interviews, to really get a sense of who the people that I'm interviewing are and how they got to be who they are, so I'd like to start all the way back with your youth—how did you get interested in food and sustainable agriculture and all those issues, and how far back this would go in your own life. So take us up through that, please.

**MW:** Well, I'd say that my agricultural background only goes back to New Jersey, which is the Garden State, but that's the end of the agriculture. I mean, there is none in my background. But, however, it was during that time, growing up in the Garden State, when I was watching the gardens disappear because there was so much development taking place, only 20 miles from New York City, that I became sensitive, I guess you would say, to the world of food production and commercial agriculture, because there was still a lot of vital commercial agriculture going on. Every time I'd ride a bicycle out five, ten miles, I'd see more of that farmland disappearing. So I don't know why, but I became very sensitive to that loss, and I carried it forward, later on, and just became more interested in food and agriculture later in college. And I think what I always remember is my first experience of hunger, which was nothing at all personal, but actual visual images of starving children in Africa, in the late 1960s, and wanting to do something about that as a college freshman, college sophomore. And I did, I tried to raise some money and raise some consciousness, but it was a very emotional experience for me, in the same way, perhaps, that watching this farmland, this beautiful farmland, disappear. I think I reacted to that loss and to that hurt. I mean, I guess it was the early stages of empathy that were coming forward in me that really carried on to this day.

**RK:** I'd imagine that that, like many of the people I'm interviewing, just the whole atmosphere of the '60s and the Vietnam War that was going on, the civil rights struggles no doubt had some impact, didn't they?

**MW:** Yeah, I was caught up in that whole maelstrom of '60s counter-culture, social activism—you know, the civil rights movement, anti-war movement—that's Vietnam. Some people don't always, when I say anti-war, they're not sure which one you're talking about. Also, the

environmental movement and the women's movement. These all came together within just a few years of each other, and I was very active in the anti-war movement in the late '60s and into the '70s. I was actually a draft resister and had refused to cooperate with the selective service system. My actions led to being convicted in a federal court for refusal to submit to induction to military service, and I spent two years on probation, federal probation, as a result of that. So I was very active in those movements, but I began to shift more into what could I do tangibly at a local level. And food was really for me that sort of gateway to change. Because, I think it was because, food was a fairly easy thing to get involved with. You didn't have to know a lot, and I was able to get involved in starting food coops and starting—this was all during my years in college—and starting a breakfast program for low-income kids in neighborhoods surrounding our campus.

**RK:** And what college was that?

**MW:** It was Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. This was like the late '60s and early '70s, so this was where I sort of earned my early stripes in the food movement. And from there I moved on to running a youth program in Massachusetts in a suburb not too far outside of Boston, and got into actually starting a farm for young people and with young people. And, again, I knew nothing about farming—I just thought it was a cool idea that we should kind of connect young people and farms. Part of it was this pressure coming from the town that, yeah, we got these kids hanging out on the street corner, they're a nuisance, people during that time didn't want to ... kids should be out of sight, out of mind, and so I had to sort of come up with projects to kind of get them involved in something, so I hit on farming. It became a very successful project that is still going on today. This is in Natick, Massachusetts, where we started this community youth farm. So that kind of inspired me, and went from there to Hartford, Connecticut in the late 1970s, because, as much as I loved kids, I really wasn't a very good counselor. [Chuckles] I wasn't a really good youth worker. I knew right away this was not where I was going to excel, but I loved the whole food world, and I loved the action, the community organizing that went along with it. It was also about that time, I think, when our food consciousness was just beginning to ferment a little bit, and we were starting to see food coops, and natural food stores were popping up, and the whole idea of organic food, even though it wasn't really well-defined, was something that was beginning to take hold. I was looking at the ... so in 1979 I had the opportunity to take this job in Hartford, Connecticut, and it was with a group called the Hartford Food System. It was an organization that had just been founded, and it was probably the first group I think anybody knows of that actually used the name "food system," or the term "food system," as part of it, which was a concept that nobody really quite understood at the time. But it was this perfect job, because what it did is it brought together this interest I had in food and agriculture with my interest in trying to address some of the underlying problems of lower income communities. It almost, sometimes I think it's a little ironic that I would have this relationship to food and agriculture as a child, and go back to the idea of watching farmland disappear, and then sort of the misery and suffering of people who are starving to death. So those two separate, apparently unrelated, activities came together in Hartford for me with the Hartford Food System. I stayed there for 25 years, and it was a terrific experience for me. I was given virtual free rein, and I loved the creativity that it allowed me, and I was able to really pursue all kinds of terrific projects. And it was also a very inspiring period, because everybody was getting excited about food and agriculture. I mean, we started a farmers' market, one of the earlier farmers markets in

the country. We did it because farmers were hurting—they weren't making enough money because they were forced to sell into the wholesale markets. And then we also found that our cities were running out of supermarkets. Literally, the supermarkets were running from the cities. And so we said, well, let's see if we can make a better deal here for the farmers at the same time that we're giving folks in the city a decent place to get food. So it was, that was a lot of what was behind the early organizing of farmers markets. There had been a few in a few other places, there was the first, probably one of the very first, most famous ones, Union Square in New York City, which wasn't far from us, and that inspired our work. But, yeah, that brought it all together, that idea of let's see if there's a connection here that helps farmers and also one that helps these lower income communities.

**RK:** I don't know much about Hartford—is it a fairly diverse town? Tell me about Hartford, and why that was a good place to get this work going.

**MW:** First of all, Hartford, it's still kind of a small city; it was about 130,000 people. But at the time I came on board it was going downhill. It had been a very prosperous city, the insurance capital of the world, really—they really invented a lot of insurance that we use today in Hartford. There were a lot of firsts associated with that city, and it was also the hub of a lot of industrial activity, a lot of products that we're quite familiar with. But that was all disappearing. It was moving to the suburbs, it was moving to other parts of the country, and a population that had been relatively balanced between white and black and mostly Puerto Rican was now becoming mostly black and Puerto Rican, and it was a lot of what we called white flight. The poverty levels, unfortunately, were escalating, along with this sort of change in the demographics, and there was a lot behind that. That's a whole big story, and there was a lot of racism involved, as well. But, regardless, there was a super, a really serious decline, economic decline, in the city, which included the loss of supermarkets. A loss of jobs, and a loss of opportunity. We said, well, let's look at food. Let's look at food as a way to try to bring some revival and at least stabilize the community, because people did have to eat. So this was this ... that spawned the idea of farmers' markets, and later spawned community gardens. It spawned buying clubs and food coops. Eventually a community supported agriculture farm came out of that. A host of nutrition programs and education programs. We also began to see nationally—this was by, let's say the '80s, 1980s, Ronald Reagan's administration came in, which changed the landscape more dramatically, because a lot of our social welfare programs and the safety net programs were being decimated, and that had a really adverse effect on lower income folks in the city. So we went ahead and started food banks. I tell people who may be under 50 that it wasn't until about 1980 that we had our first food bank in the country. I mean, they were very few and far between. They were mostly settlement houses and the old Salvation Army, you know, those kind of charitable programs that date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. But what we think of today as these big, giant, hundred-thousand-square-foot, multi-story food banks didn't exist until about ... started in a much smaller scale early '80s in response to what was going on with the Reagan administration. So we got involved in that. So, really, you could just see this progression in terms of need and hungry people and food insecurity. We started to use terms like food insecurity or food security, and we did studies to document high rates of food insecurity. We did studies to document the loss of supermarkets and the high prices that people were having to pay in the city. And we also began to ... at the same time we were always kind of moving along and keeping in touch with what was happening in our state's agricultural economy, too, because we were also

seeing a decline in the number of farmers and the amount of farmland. So all of these things began to sort of conspire together to make things worse, and so we were very much in the middle of trying to come up with alternatives. I mean, the conventional way of getting food and being able to afford food was drying up, and something new had to be invented in order to move ahead and help out that community of Hartford.

**RK:** I wanted to get to a couple things. One of them, as you were talking about the things and you were using, quite appropriately, I am sure, the term—the things we were doing, is how were you funded? I'm sure you weren't personally getting rich during that time, and you must have been struggling for money all this time, trying to keep these projects going. I'd like to hear a little bit about that.

**MW:** My Mercedes Benz—I had to keep it longer than I wanted to. You know, like wouldn't trade it in as often. Yeah. Well we were—fundraising was a fulltime job for me, along with the other 50 things I had to do. We were always raising money from foundations, and in our community we were raising money from the insurance companies, private donors. We were not getting much in the way of public funds. Sometimes we'd get a little bit from the city of Hartford, but there were very few federal grants, or there was no, virtually no state money available. Salaries were low, and our offices looked like a mini-slum. It was, you know, tough. Anybody who wanted to work for us had to be a person who really did see that this was a job that was about changing the community. It was not about getting rich or having a nice, comfortable corner office. You were going to be...

**RK:** Exactly.

**MW:** ... on the streets and doing a lot of work that way. But, yes, it was—fundraising was a very difficult, long-term, always constant kind of process for us at that time.

**RK:** Well, one of the things that I know you, by reputation, about more than anything else, are the food policy councils. And I'm sure this work led to this, and Hartford was among the first, no doubt. I'd like to hear about how that came about. And then I saw today, something I read a couple of days ago, there are something like 280 food councils around the country now, and I think that your work was the germ of a lot of that activity. Please talk about that.

**MW:** Yeah, there's actually about 250 food policy councils in the United States, and there's probably 40 or 50 in Canada. Some of the work we've done has been with—and when I say we, I'm talking in this case about the Center for a Livable Future, which is part of the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, and I work part-time with them. But I think the story I'd like to tell is about the transition that I made in my head from doing this program work, this kind of street work, you might say, and organizing work, to public policy. And I didn't come, as a young person, still relatively young, mid-30s, doing a lot of hands-on work—I didn't really understand what public policy was. It hit me one day, finally, that while here I am working very hard to organize farmers markets in these very low-income communities, I'm also ... I'm seeing farmers get suddenly very excited about going into higher-income communities. Because Connecticut was one of the highest income states in the country. We were looking at Greenwich, Connecticut, Darien, Westport—I mean, these are all very high-end communities. Hartford was one of the

poorest cities in the country, on a per-capita income basis. So we were competing for farmers in a dwindling number of farmers with these very high-end communities. So how do I ... here I start a farm market here, and I lose another one there. I start one here and I lose another one. So I finally hit on this idea as a result of meeting with some people in Massachusetts that we need to provide some kind of incentive to our low-income shoppers to go to the farmers' market. And we hit on what later became known as the farmers' market nutrition program. You know, where we provided vouchers to WIC—that's Women Infants and Children—participants in that federal program. And this was kind of a joint effort that it began to ... we started up a version in Hartford that later went state-wide. We were working with people in Massachusetts...

**RK:** Like Gus Schumacher?

**MW:** Gus Schumacher. Hugh Joseph. A couple of folks that aren't with us anymore—one was in Pennsylvania, a great guy named Jim Stevenson. Dan Cooper, who was in Iowa, with the Iowa Department of Agriculture. John [Balchek], who goes back to Jim Hightower's days as a Texas secretary of agriculture there. Unfortunately, all three men are no longer with us. But this was the kind of ... we got together and worked together and we created the National Farmers Market Nutrition Program, or the National WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program. And Gus Schumacher was very much the inspiration behind all of that, but all of us are collectively working together, discovering a new idea all at once and getting very excited about it. And then going back and forth between our respective states and Washington, DC, to lobby. But here it was again, another manifestation of this connection between agriculture, local food, regional food system, and low-income communities, and the sort of emerging idea of food security. It was apropos for me to be thinking of this in terms of the Hartford food system, the idea of a food system as being one that would connect all of these dots within our regional food system. But that's where my shift into policy was really motivated as much by my frustration for not being able to do my job of trying to bring good healthy local food into communities. So we could hit on this policy solution which leveled the playing field. It said all right, the marketplace is skewed toward the rich, those folks who have no problem at all getting a farmers' market going, again in Greenwich, Connecticut, but what about the poor neighborhoods of Hartford. We needed to have some policy intervention, some money coming from the taxpayers to be able to level that playing field. And it worked—at the time we got this program started in the late 1980s in Connecticut, there were about 15 farmers' markets. Today there's 150.

**RK:** In Connecticut?

**MW:** In Connecticut. But that's the story everywhere. You go to any state and you'll see the same kind of growth. And that is a phenomenal part of the food story, I think. National story. We've seen these 10-, 15-, 20-fold increases in the number of farmers' markets in maybe a 30-year period.

**RK:** And it opened people's palates, I think, to better food.

**MW:** Well that was it. I mean, the farmers markets became that kind of the storefront, in a way, for the food movement, the local food movement. From there we go to CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture). It would go to Farm to Restaurants, it would to Farm to School. You

know, many different variations on this local food theme kind of started with the farmers' markets.

**RK:** And exactly, then, where did the food council concept come into that picture.

**MW:** I'm sorry, I forgot. [Chuckles] Well, food policy councils came about because, probably in this case more directly related to the food insecurity side of the equation. We in Hartford had become aware of the concept of food policy councils partly from some of the earlier work that had been done in other places. You and I were talking about Saint Paul, Minnesota a little earlier, and that was one inspiration. Knoxville, Tennessee, interestingly enough, was the site of the first food policy council in the country, and that continues to operate today, so it's also the oldest. So my idea here was that we had to get local government involved in these problems. That it wasn't enough to have a little bit of money come in from here and there, but we needed a really strong engagement by government, because it goes back to my thinking about policy. You need to have public policy as part of your solution. You can't rely on just your own program and project development work to solve what are really immense, complex problems. And so the idea of a food policy council was let's bring government together with the private sector, both the for-profit side of the food system, as well as the non-profit organizations that were doing so much. And they were all going to sit around the table together and work on this. So we were actually, the thing that kind of gave us the kick in the butt on this was a study that had been released that showed incredibly high levels of childhood hunger in Hartford. It was like 75 percent of young people under, like, 200 percent of the poverty level, were experiencing fairly serious food insecurity. And, in fact, the research that had been done at that time in Hartford, and also in New Haven, Connecticut, was what later inspired the U.S. Department of Agriculture to develop its food security measures, which are now fairly commonplace. Those were started by USDA in the mid-1990s, but the practice and pilot work for that measurement took place in Hartford and in New Haven. But anyway, that led to—I mean, the headline in *The Hartford Current* was "Seventy-five percent of Low Income Children are Hungry," and that was a banner headline. From there it was quite easy to convince the mayor and the city council of Hartford to do something about it, which one of the things they did was to establish the food policy council. It became and now is, remains, the second-longest-running food policy council in the country, after Knoxville.

**RK:** Oh, really.

**MW:** Yes.

**RK:** You touched on this slightly, but a typical food council, what will it be composed of as far as people or sectors?

**MW:** Well, like I said, government—in government it might be representatives from the health department and from the school systems, and perhaps the economic development and planning, particularly planning. We began to convince—and this has always been an interesting process of educating city leaders, but it's why do you as a city have a stake in food? And that was a big argument. I can remember sitting down with the mayor of Hartford, going back 25 years, and he's saying—why should I care about food? I got like, my schools are collapsing, and we don't

have enough housing, and poor people can't afford to live here, and you want to talk about food? Gradually we were able to get him to say, well, that is, also, a part of the problem and the city can do something about it. You have a planning department, you have a health department. You have economic development. You know, food is part of all those things, if you stop to think about it. So we were able to convince folks that, yes, the city had a role in solving these problems. At the same time we had these organizations were popping up in different ways. I mean, this was another sort of bigger story of what was going on nationally. Food banks—a typical community would have a food bank. Typical community would have a group organizing farmers' markets. A typical community would have a community gardening, urban agriculture piece. Oftentimes you had other sections. There were federal programs, like WIC and food stamps and school meals. None of them were talking to each other; they all operated in their own little silos, their own little programs, and there was no table around which to sit and talk about these issues together. And so that's what the food policy council was trying to do. It was trying to provide for that central hub for these different interests and stakeholders to come together and sort of look at this whole food system as a common problem that they could all, in their own way, influence. So those are the typical members or stakeholders. Some people do it a little differently. There's been many interpretations. I tried to insist for a long time that there was only one way of doing this, and I failed completely. And so people have decided to use their own, their inspiration and imagination to create the idea of food policy councils, but I still think of it as an organized effort to bring together many different stakeholders within a defined political and jurisdictional boundaries and defined geography. But it does encompass the food system, so even though you might be a city, you're also bringing in farmers and other agricultural interests as well.

**RK:** I see you have a number of publications over time, but you sort of wrote the book. When I was looking at some of the references, you wrote a whole manual that is a resource for cities that want to get a food council started.

**MW:** Yeah, we did a manual called *Doing Food Policy Councils Right*. That still is the document that gets used a lot. Unfortunately, through my affiliation with Johns Hopkins and Center for a Livable Future, we've been able to add tons of more scholarly, better researched documents to that one manual, so now we have ... there's a lot more ways to learn how to develop food policy councils, operate them. Different ... sort of the whole evolution of local policy. This has been a fascinating area for me is just to see how cities and counties and also states have begun to enter into the whole food system game. You know, policies related to urban agriculture, making it easier for farmers' markets to locate and operate. School food programs. You know, just what we might think of as comprehensive planning, so that when we are doing the typical work of planning at city and county level, we're thinking about food. It's not some afterthought, that it's actually central to the planning process. So I always kind of look at it as being the role of food policy councils, and what I've been trying to do with food policy all along is to make food and farming a part of the policy agenda of every city, county, and state in the country.

**RK:** And you referred to, in the '90s, where the federal government stepped in more in this whole area. Were you involved, probably, in some of the lobbying for that, that made it happen?

**MW:** Yes, yeah—that was so why stop at the city or state level—we’re going to go to the top. And so like I said earlier, with the farmers’ market nutrition program, that was my first real foray into national food policy work. But I think the thing that it’s perhaps instructive to know is that there was, that food policy at the national level, during the ‘80s, consisted of the farm bill and child nutrition. Farm bill included food stamps, which later became SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), and it also included the commodity programs that supported the main—wheat, corn, etc. And then there were, and then child nutrition dealt with school meals, school lunch and school breakfast. But there was nothing within those two larger pieces of federal food and ag policy that included local food systems. There wasn’t a connection anywhere in that federal system that brought together this emerging idea of local food, of farmers’ markets, and of communities trying to solve their own problems in terms of food. That just didn’t exist; there was no place for it. So the farmers market nutrition program, which became a federal funding program, was really the first place for that, the first time that happened. There was a couple of very small exceptions a little earlier, very small pilot projects, like a million dollars, I think, that provided some early assistance to farmers’ markets, and that program only lasted a couple of years. There was another one for urban agriculture. But they were very small, they never got much attention, and they never went outside of more than a handful of communities. So we were starting to say how can we get more federal funding to support more grassroots community, ground-up kinds of food activities? This farmers market nutrition program became the first one. Later on, right after that, we, me, working with the emerging Community Food Security Coalition, a national non-profit organization that I was involved in as a co-founder, hatched the idea of what became the Community Food Project Grant Program. So that was another manifestation of this need to bring the federal government into community-based solutions to food security and farm-related problems. And that became in the ... I think it was 1996 is when that program began. That came out of that farm bill. We made it a part of that farm bill. And that provided grant money, and it’s now up to nine million dollars a year, grant money to let communities try to solve some of their own food-related problems. Using a lot of the terminology around self-reliance, community self-reliance, building your capacity to meet your own food needs, doing it in a multi-stakeholder kind of way. How do we engage a wider array of the community, particularly those who are the most vulnerable in a community. All of this became part of this community food project grant concept, which is now ... it’s been going 20 years at this point.

**RK:** I want to go into this probably a little more in depth a little later here, but that’s probably where you started bumping into the sustainable ag folks, even like Ferd Hoefner and those people, because a lot of that work began in the early ‘80s, and then but by the farm bills by the ‘90s, there was real efforts to expand and broaden the view of it, in part because of the growth of agriculture touched more directly on food. So do you have anything to say about that?

**MW:** Yeah, well, it’s, um ... if my memory was a little sharper, I could probably say more, but I think what I’m ... we started, the Community Food Security Coalition started bumping into these wonderful characters like Ferd Hoefner and Margaret Krome and others—and Kathy Ozer, who, sadly, just passed away a few weeks ago.

**RK:** Roger Blobaum would be among them?

**MW:** Yeah, right, right. And these were all folks who had their feet planted in Washington food politics. I mean, they got it, and they ... but not a lot had been happening, or it was just beginning to happen. You were just beginning to see the Organic Standards Act, I think it was that...

**RK:** 1990 was the Organic Food Production Act.

**MW:** Yeah, and people like Kathy Ozer, who were talking about the various farm problems and price problems that farmers had and so forth. And then just the very early stages of sustainability, of sustainable farming. Sustainable agriculture becoming sort of meshing or merging in some way with organic agriculture. And then so these other folks like the community food security folks are coming together, talking about community food systems and food security, and they were interested in sustainability, but they weren't exactly what you would say sustainability experts. So meeting up with people like Ferd Hoefner and Kathy Ozer and to some extent Roger Blobaum, these were folks that had, kind of gave us a little bit better understanding of where there was some intersection between community food systems and sustainability. But also, clearly, where does it connect, potentially, with federal policy. So Ferd Hoefner became for us, and still remains for many people, the guru, not just on sustainable food systems, but also on almost everything related to food and ag policy at a national level.

**RK:** Right. That's very true. It's certainly true for the conservation side of that work, too, is where my work, basically, came from, but it's been really important that those two met. The other thing that I think was so important about that coming together was that for so long the commodity program and the world of food—and food stamps and all of that—were almost at odds with each other, and there still is some of that. They're all vying for a big pot of money, getting their chunk, and trying to bring some of those things together. But I think on a positive level is the whole issue around food brought more, a deeper understanding to what sustainable agriculture ought to be, too. It's important to bring those together.

**MW:** I think the average American had an understanding of agriculture as being no more than like this deep.

**RK:** Right.

**MW:** And I think it was partly because the farm bill had been divided into commodities. Michael Pollen has told us that part of our problem with commodities is it's not really food. I mean, I can't go out and eat wheat and corn and so forth out of a field. We've got to do a lot with it. And that a lot of the food that people would actually eat or should be eating was not even part of federal policy. So there was a disconnect between the whole idea of federal policy, particularly agriculture policy, and the farm bill, which included mostly commodities and the food stamp program, a disconnect between that and the whole idea of a local food system, and food that people would eat. It was like this huge gap. In fact, it was so big we didn't even know it was there. [Chuckles] And it wasn't until, I think, farmers' markets began to come along that people began to reconnect with the idea of local food. I mean, I'm not even sure reconnection is the right word, but that consciousness began to emerge. And, you know, there's a million side stories off of that that include Alice Waters and so forth. But I think that it was a sensibility had been aroused for local food through farmers' markets. And, as I said earlier, that all those

extensions into other CSAs and restaurants and so forth that began to say, all right, let's take a look at how policy can raise up that whole local food arena and connect to food security, connect to food stamps, connect to commodities. Can we begin to sort of imagine a whole different kind of food system emerging here, one that is actually responsive to the general public and their growing awareness of food.

**RK:** And that extends, I think, out of the brilliance of Ken Cook and the Environmental Working Group is now, through their work of pointing out where some of the healthier food is, and really examining it and making that information—they're not the only ones doing it, but among the main groups doing this. What the sustainable ag folks are hoping it will do is that it will bring a constituency of urban people. People who care about food will start caring about what is happening on the land itself—what's being put on the land, what's being put on the food. So there's where the meeting also has another benefit.

**MW:** Yeah, I think there's ... I mean, it's almost impossible to track the emergence of our consciousness around our food system these days, over the last 10 or 20 years, but, again, I think it is just a growing awareness of where our food actually comes from. We actually understand that better than we used to. And we also have made these connections with health. I think it's almost ironic to think that food was disconnected from health for so long. You know, we didn't really understand that. Even though dieticians, and there were some nutritionists and others, particularly in the extension system, cooperative extension system, who were trying to help people make those connections, but they tended to be a little bit on the fuddy-duddy side, because they kind of came out of an old-school way of thinking about cooking and shopping and budgeting and so forth. But we became aware in the '90s that what you eat is what you are, and the concept of food as medicine also was emerging, as well as really some serious problems around overweight and obesity. I mean, the number that still strikes me—it still kind of kicks me in the gut these days—is in the early '90s only 13 percent of the population was obese. Today it's over 30 percent. So in a 25-year period we've gone from 13 percent to over 30 percent of us being obese, meaning we're in a very unhealthy state. So that kind of came along and made people realize that we've got to make a better connection between health and diet. And then extending that back further to questions of sustainability and the sources of our food. Then again, as I mentioned earlier, just the emergence of our understanding of hunger and food insecurity, that also started up in the mid-1990s. And so our public consciousness has increased, our awareness has increased, I mean our consciousness has expanded to include more of these elements within our food system.

**RK:** I think it owes quite a bit to my own ignorance, but it was relatively recently in my own life that I really came to understand the link between obesity and poverty. It doesn't seem to ... it always used to be the association that if people were overweight it was probably because they were kind of wealthy or something like that. It was quite the opposite.

**MW:** I know, and to some extent, there's a relationship between what we came to call food deserts, communities that didn't have any kind of place to shop for healthy food, and obesity, overweight, diabetes, poor health. These connections started to be made, but people didn't get that at all. I would be doing this work in Hartford, and nobody understood that it was a problem that people living in these communities had no place to shop. Well, we go to the suburbs, five or

ten miles away, and you can get to any decent supermarket that anybody else is shopping at. Well, I can't get there; I don't have a car, and I often don't have enough money. And I have to rely on public transit, and public buses didn't take me to those places. They were designed to take people out to the suburbs to their homes at the end of the day and bring them back into the downtown to work for the insurance companies during the day. So it was all these, so much public education had to go on as a part of this work, but I think eventually that has paid off, so now we understand we have food deserts—we got to fix that. Yeah, that's related to health, it's related to obesity. Let's look at, at the same time, how we can make other connections to where our food is grown. I'll even go from there into our understanding of farmland and farming, which is another, sort of, piece of this interesting, fascinating puzzle that ... I'm sitting in a meeting in 1999 in Hartford, state capital, and we had just started our state food policy council, and a guy walks into the meeting, he says—I just got this study that shows that ... it was from the Natural Resource Conservation Service, NRCS ... and it says that Connecticut is losing more farmland as a percentage of its remaining farmland than any other state in the country. And if we keep going at this rate, we will have no farmland by the year 2050. And everybody goes—what! No one had been aware of that. They sort of had their own stories about this farm that was lost in their community or that farm, but nobody had seen the numbers in aggregate before. So this really inspired our state food policy council to do something about it. We moved ahead pretty briskly to come up with a statewide conference on the issue, raised consciousness significantly. It launched us into a new organization called the Working Lands Alliance, which became a huge coalition of groups that included farm organizations, even the more conservative ones like the Farm Bureau, our Organic Farming Association—it even included hunters who were concerned about the loss of habitat and land for hunting. It included all the food security people, the food banks people. Within two years we had 150 organizations who had become part of the Working Lands Alliance. And they launched a very bold agenda, a public policy agenda to ... Yeah, so in response to this dramatic loss of farmland and the realization that the state of Connecticut was not stepping up to try to address this problem—I mean, we literally had a governor who only looked at farmland as a place for the next development to occur. His idea of an economic opportunity was to build on it, had no sensitivity whatsoever to farming and farmland loss. Anyway, we had to organize to respond to that, so that Working Lands Alliance became the launching pad for a very bold public policy agenda that eventually leveraged anywhere from \$10-to-\$20 million a year for the purchase of development rights. So we went from, actually, from having protected ... the time we started, protected maybe 150 farms up to almost 400 farms in a 10-year period, because of the new financing that the state had made available. And we also used that as an additional launching pad to another organization called the Connecticut Farmland Trust, which was a private land trust, a non-profit land trust, but focused on farmland preservation. The combination of all these things again raised the state consciousness and the public's consciousness dramatically. And the thing that was the lever, the thing that made that connection, that pivot point for all these different initiatives, was food, that food was what this was about. We are producing food in this state for people who live here. And we made it even more exciting because we brought in some really cool chefs to talk about that, and we even brought in some celebrities, like Meryl Streep and Paul Newman, who lived in Connecticut, to become spokespeople for farmland preservation. And so suddenly farming and food became very, very sexy as a result of this. One thing fed on another, and pretty soon that public policy interest on the part of the state had become rather pronounced and very robust, as a result of that public awareness.

**RK:** Very good. Well, I wanted to put it back a little more on the personal side. I saw that you were a Kellogg food policy fellow. Did that involve a particular project or just allow you to continue your good work you were already doing?

**MW:** Yeah.

**RK:** That would have been in the early 2000s, wasn't it?

**MW:** Yeah, I was a Kellogg Food and Society Policy Fellow, which I get the name right, from 2002 to 2004. It was a two-year commitment. And what it really allowed me to do is to develop my communication skills so that I could talk more effectively about policy, and that's what it was designed to do. I think it did that; it certainly helped. From there I didn't have a particular project at the time that I was involved in the fellowship, but I was always interested in writing, and so the fellowship really kind of gave me some tools and some inspiration to start writing about the things that I had been doing. So it led to some magazine articles that were pretty much about these connections between local food and food security and sustainability, and it also led to me writing two books. The first one was called *Closing the Food Gap*, which was all about stuff I've been talking about. And the second one is called *Food Rebels, Guerrilla Gardeners, and Smart Cookin' Mamas*. So I'm actually working on a third book right now.

**RK:** What's that going to be about?

**MW:** Well, that's called *Stand Together or Starve Alone: Unity and Chaos in the U.S. Food Movement*. So that book is about the need to collaborate, that we need to be working together as organizations and as interest groups and different sectors of the food system in order to make bigger and more pronounced impact on the problems that we face in the food system. So that book is just about done, and it might be out in a year or so, if I really get my act together.

**RK:** Well, in light of the recent election, I think that makes it all the more important to have that book.

**MW:** Yeah, when I first started the book I had no idea that we would be facing the kind of obstacles that we are facing today, politically. I thought we'd at least have the wind to our back. Now it looks like a really strong headwind instead. So, I think the idea that we have to work together is even more imperative than it was before. And I'll go back to, I'll give kudos to the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition in that regard, because I use them in my book as a model of a collaborative effort. They have done an extraordinary job of bringing people together from different sectors. They've managed their growth very, very well, their growth, both in terms of members and in diversity, and in terms of the issues that they're taking on. And I've looked around, looked around at the country, and I couldn't find anything really comparable in terms of organizational development and organizational diversity. So they are an inspiration in that regard, and I think we need to kind of keep building on their model in order to nurture some really strong collaborations.

**RK:** Excellent. I wanted to touch, too, on your work as a senior advisor for the Food Policy Network Project, Johns Hopkins. You mentioned it, but you're still doing that, right?

**MW:** Yes, I am. I mean, the story of that is I probably skipped over a discussion of the Community Food Security Coalition, and I mentioned that I was a co-founder of that, and that started in the mid-'90s. They became very active in a number of farm bill issues, which also gave us another opportunity to work with NSAC, and probably the most defined moment was in the 2008 Farm Bill. We were partnering with NSAC on a project called the Food-Farm Policy Project—FFPP. That, actually, together collaboratively along with about five or six other national organizations, including the Environmental Defense Fund, NSAC, and the Rural Coalition was another one of the members of that group. We actually put forward about 35 proposals for that farm bill, and about 25 of those proposals were enacted and did find their way into the farm bill. About half of the remainder kind of got redefined, but found a place somewhere in the farm bill and about half a dozen or so did die. But it was a rather successful collaboration, at least in terms of the output of new policy initiatives. But anyway, the point is that during my time at the Community Food Security Coalition I also started to develop this work I've been doing with food policy councils. Since I'd been doing it in Hartford and then the state of Connecticut, I've been asked to speak to groups and help them start food policy councils, I felt that we needed more of a real institutional home, and for awhile the Community Food Security Coalition provided that. However, they went out of business in 2011, and that was sort of a long, sad story, but they did go out of business, and I didn't have a place for the food policy council work to take place. And I had worked with Johns Hopkins and the Center for a Livable Future off and on for a few years, so I knew these were pretty good folks, and that this might be a nice home for the food policy council work, so I simply went to them and said—here, you can have this work; you can even have me, as long as you give me a paycheck every now and then. And it's been a very nice marriage for the last, almost five, years. They have been really expanding the food policy councils. All the work related to developing and expanding food policy councils now resides with the Center for a Livable Future at Johns Hopkins, and I continue to work with them part-time.

**RK:** It allows you to live in Santa Fe. We should note we're not here on vacation, we're here because this is where you live now.

**MW:** This is my home—I get to do some work here. I'm not just here to become a margarita aficionado, and a connoisseur of great chili—I'm also here for a purpose. Johns Hopkins is in Baltimore—I go there occasionally to do the work, but I cyber commute the rest of the time. And so the interesting story—just look at the numbers again—we did a census of food policy councils in 2011, and we found 111. We just completed the 2016 census, and we now have 250, so that's just about a five-year period of significant growth. The story there, really, is that, number one, people are beginning to understand the role of policy. They're beginning to see local and state government as a player in the food system. They also are seeing the need to work together. People, stakeholders, are saying—yeah, we got to work together one way or the other. We've been doing this work on our own, been a bunch of lonesome cowboys out there. We now have to come together and start to really do something together that we can't do alone. And that, I think, has been a lot of the inspiration for food policy councils. Now, having said all that, they struggle. I mean, making those things work and having them be effective has not always been

easy. Part of what we're trying to do at Johns Hopkins is develop the tools and learn and bring together the best practices and just learn what's working and what's not, and then disseminate that information around the country. So we do a lot of work in that regard, from webinars to having great resources compiled in one place, to doing trainings and workshops, and so forth.

**RK:** One of the things I'm enjoying about the process of doing these interviews is the connections among people, and I know there is where you connect with Kate Clancy. You probably have earlier, too, but she's one of the ...

**MW:** Yeah, Kate Clancy is also at the Center for a Livable Future. She's one of my heroes. She's just been the person that I always admired. She's definitely one of the early pioneers in the food movement and connecting food security and nutrition and sustainability. I mean, she's been ... she was probably the first person that I know of who got it, who made those connections going back. Ferd and I met her when she was teaching at Syracuse University.

**RK:** I want to look a little towards the future, but before we do that I wanted to also look once again at the past. What do you think were maybe some missed opportunities or things you look back on and wish we'd done a little differently?

**MW:** Well, I'm sure that there's many, but I think kind of the one big thing that has happened—and this is what I'm writing about in my book now—is the failure to collaborate. And what happened is each major piece of the food movement, as it started out, would usually work with others, but then it became a force unto itself. Food banks are an example of that. I mean, food banks were supposed to be temporary, supposed to be emergency. They were supposed to be a part of the community and working with others. Well, they became an institution unto themselves, and became bigger, and their own associations and their own conferences and their own lobbyists, and that's been the story of, sort of, organizational development and institutional evolution now in the food movement for a long, long time. I see it also with Farm to School, which is something, another ... we haven't talked about that, but Farm to School, bringing food from the farms to our school cafeterias. We started a Farm to School program in Hartford in the late '90s. It got incubated nationally with the Community Food Security Coalition, but then eventually it spun off into its own organization called the National Farm to School Network—again a sort of institutionalizing and separating itself out from these other efforts. This is what concerns me. The work of changing our food system is so important it cannot be done by any one entity, no matter how big it is. And so I would say that both the growth and the institutionalization of different sectors of our food system and the resulting inability to collaborate effectively across these different sector lines has been the source of most frustration for me.

**RK:** I guess that points to my last question about what next. When you think about the food movement broadly, what would you say are the issues that are most important or where a lot of the energy should go, say in the next decade or more?

**MW:** Yes, I think, going forward from here, what the food movement has to do is, first of all, to look at its own internal operation. By internal I mean sort of inter-organizational and inter-institutional. We can't be building silos; we have to be breaking silos down and finding ways to

work together. We use the term these days, “collective impact,” and it’s a term that has perhaps been over-used and diluted in terms of its meaning, but I think that essentially it says that we got to find an effective way to work together. And we know there are certain ways to work together effectively. You know, good communication, coming up with common goals, a common vision. You know, the food movement really doesn’t have a common vision at this point in time. Everybody will talk about first their ... whether it’s food security, if that’s what we’re doing, or they’ll talk about sustainability, or they’ll talk about health and diet and obesity, but we have to find ways to connect these issues. I think it’s through these kinds of organizational and institutional entities that we’re going to create that kind of framework. I don’t see any other path at this point. Now, going beyond that and going even deeper, making it even more complicated is the fact that we are a divided nation, racially. We’re also a divided nation in terms of income equality. We are ... so much inequality in the American socio-economic system, and sometimes food system people don’t know quite how to jump into that, how to be a player in that. But I think they have to do that, they have to realize that the questions of race and income inequality in this country are very dominant, and we have to find a way to that discussion and be a part of that discussion. I mean, one simple example is—I use this with people who get very excited about trying to get more money for the SNAP Program or build more food banks. I say—folks, that’s not going to be enough. It’s not going to be enough to put more money into SNAP and put more money in the food banks when income inequality continues to grow. You could solve the problem of food insecurity fairly easily by raising the minimum wage to sort of the \$15-to-\$20 an hour range, by taxing the super-rich—not even taxing their income, but just taxing their wealth alone would be enough to have a major impact. It’s funny—it’s tragic that, in a way, that the solutions are fairly straightforward, yet we take this very round about approach of trying to tweak and incrementally increase funding for our food programs. The United States is very unique in terms of its approach to social welfare, because it puts so much of our eggs in the food basket, rather than looking at these broader socio-economic problems. So I think that that context and those problems are the ones that the food movement’s going to have to focus on eventually, as well as that bigger problem of inter-movement collaboration.

**RK:** I can’t resist bringing this up, even though it maybe brings up a whole other topic of discussion which we don’t really have time to do. But there’s also a very divided agriculture. We have industrial agriculture on one side which is seemingly going merrily along in its way of getting more and more reductionist and more and more chemically intensive and all of that. And on the other hand, we’re trying to have a sustainable movement that goes in a more organic direction. People like Wendell Berry have written about how long can these two systems really exist when they’re almost at contradictory purpose. It’s another of the divides.

**MW:** Yes. This is definitely a quandary. I would also play devil’s advocate by suggesting that some corporations, some of the big food players are trying to pay attention, at least ... some would call it lip service. Others, I could say in some cases they are making a sincere effort to reformulate food products, go more in the direction of sustainability, and provide healthier products, both for the planet and for people. I would try to give them the benefit of the doubt. And I would be more inclined to do so if they were willing to work within a regulatory framework and not spend millions of dollars to try to defeat initiatives that are designed to ... not to undermine the businesses, but to actually promote health—environmental health and human health. So if we could find some common ground—I think there is common ground, actually. It’s

interesting—when we look at the evolution of food work over the last 20 years, I do think there is common ground. We would have to find a way to partner together to accept some degree of regulation, because you can't rely on voluntary commitment, I think, of the food industry. The progress that is made is the progress in terms of the public's eye in the way we eat, the way we think about food production—the progress is because of the push of sustainable food systems and the people who've been a part of that. So for better or for worse, whether their response is anemic or robust in the food industry, it's because of sustainable food advocates pushing so hard over the last many years, and that the public getting that, getting the importance of that. So what's the next chapter look like? I'm not sure, but I think it's going to be more pushing, more pulling. Some fights. It's not going to be helped, unfortunately, by the current administration, but I think that over time you're going to find more common ground and there'll be a greater acceptance of the role of government in trying to promote a healthy, sustainable food system.

**RK:** Well, we'll look forward to seeing your new book, which I think will deal with a lot of that subject about how we can work together and get at some of these issues.

**MW:** Yes.

**RK:** Well, thank you very much. It was a very enlightening conversation. I very much appreciate it—thanks, Mark.

**MW:** Thanks, Ron. Thanks for coming to Santa Fe.

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