

Bob Scowcroft
Mark Lipson
Narrators

Ron Kroese
Interviewer

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Bob Scowcroft—BS
Mark Lipson—ML
Ron Kroese—RK

RK: It's early afternoon in Santa Cruz on December 15, 2016, and now we're going to have a dialog between two men who've been very important to the growth and advancement of organic farming, organic research, both in California and, indeed, around the country, especially with policy work in Washington, DC. So, Mark, I'd like you to start it off with some account about how you first connected up with Bob. I know your careers have intersected a number of ways, and we'd like to hear about it. And then Bob can pick up on the story of where you went to, and do it as a dialog, and I'll just interject whenever I feel something I want to direct you towards.

ML: Well, I'm not sure you remember this, but the first time we met was on campus at UC Santa Cruz, and I was still a student in environmental studies, and you came in to talk about the organizing work you were doing with Friends of the Earth around pesticides. So that must have been like '80 or '81.

BS: About then, probably more '81.

ML: Then it was six years later when I was responsible for hiring the new executive director for CCOF. I had been working since summer of '85 as the first paid staff for CCOF. I had already been farming for a couple of years, but I had a part-time job as the executive secretary, I believe we called it, was the first paid staff person for CCOF, took it out of the dining room table from Barney Bricmont, who had just been doing it as a volunteer effort in his house, and the board finally had a little bit of money to hire a regular staff person, so I became that first paid staff, but I was farming; I didn't want to do it fulltime. And then when there was a little more money to hire an executive director, we did the search, and the first day that it was in the newspaper classifieds, I got a call from Bob Scowcroft, and he said—this is my job.

RK: That's California Certified Organic Farming, right?

BS: California Certified Organic Farmers.

RK: And, briefly, Mark, what was or what is its mission?

ML: California Certified Organic Farmers was a grower-owned and -driven organization set up to certify organic status, to provide inspection and verification of organic performance.

BS: I have a very clear picture of that presentation, not necessarily what I said, but that Mark came up afterwards and asked detailed and extremely sophisticated questions, of which about half I could answer, on pesticides and toxicity and use, and at the time I'd been very successful at Friends of the Earth, of finding incredibly talented interns that wanted to get in, really around Brower and that movement. It was an attractive place for a lot of people. And I thought Mark could be a great ... it was already working on organic, and he'd be a great intern, and pitched it, and he had no interest in coming to the city. At least that's what I left with. Oh, darn, that was a good one. I don't remember meeting at Eco-Farms. I don't know if you were going to them then. I was still going to every one. But I was hanging out at the Farm and Garden, and in '84 or '5, as I was looking for different work, Friends of the Earth was transitioning. Steve Gliessman was taking a sabbatical, and he offered me a sum of money to be a visiting lecturer. I didn't have any academic credibility, but I was a good talker, and I thought I could. We actually mapped out on a pad of paper what a series of classes and conversations would look like. And the money sounded really good, and actually that was the catalyst to go to Judy, my wife, and say—hey, I think I have some income for us to move to Santa Cruz. I think I'm being a visiting lecturer, somewhere in '85, with Gliessman. And by the time we had made all the decisions and house and eviction—actually, they were transitioning out—Steve said—I don't know what I was thinking; it doesn't work in any way shape or form with the university, and hope it wasn't a big deal. It was a good idea, but it's not going to happen. And that's when the—oh, my goodness, our son's challenged, I need not only income for this transitional amount of time, but I need health insurance. That was a major impact on the home front, but by then the office manager at FOE had, I'd gotten her into the apprenticeship program, and then she fell for the assistant director of the apprenticeship program, so they were in Santa Cruz at the farm, and I'd visit her there, and then I'd go ... she went on to college ... she was a self-taught ... got her degree, went to Davis, got an ag degree up there—[Carol Breen], with Steve someone. So I was around the farm visiting either with her or some of the other ones. I just loved the place. It was really wonderful. And then time passed, I didn't realize—I know you've said this before, but I was looking at the paper for anything, anything, and it was like car salesman ... I've got to get some work! And there was the ad. I cut that out—I still have that, the original ad.

ML: [Chuckles] So we hired Bob to become the first fulltime executive director at CCOF, and that was 1987.

BS: It was to start January 2, '88, but I started coming in to get to meet people and to do a plan and see what I was facing. I went to the October CCOF board meeting and got the vote and got hired there. The interviews had happened earlier, and I'd kept them secret, and then November I came by, like, where's the desk, and I'll come by over Christmas holiday so I could hit the ground. All volunteer—no problem, I just want to do this. I want to get out of what I'm doing. I don't remember the exact day or moment that Mark laid out—so great you're here—here are the challenges we face. They were pretty stunning.

ML: And by the way, I'm going to New Zealand for three weeks in February. [Chuckles]

BS: I thought that happened later, but, yeah, that was just one more blow of—thank God you're here—no money, no rent, no certification, all chaos. The certification staff person was also

leaving, and so I had to hire a new certification coordinator. But I was mostly focused on ... for both self and group. I've told my wife I'm getting paid the second week of January, my first job, at a higher salary than I'd ever made, and it's not going to happen. What do I do now? Never mind for ... Mark's leaving in February, but he hadn't been paid in two months, and it would be nice if ... it was a wild time.

RK: I know that when you came into it, Bob, that you found a situation that wasn't ideal, with regard to finances, etc. So Mark and Bob, how did you deal with that? How did you salvage the organization and manage to keep working together and pull out to where within a few years you had a much more successful organization?

ML: I let Bob take care of it. [Chuckles]

BS: I can put some nuance to that. Basically, I've been an organizer. It's been eight, really nine years. I worked for Alaska Coalition for a year, so I've been doing this for eight full years, and it's just step back, sort this out. There are emergencies all over the map. Some are capital E, some are smaller. Let's prioritize them and as a group come to an agreement on what they are, and then I'll make decisions. I never had a problem with saying—OK, I've listened to everybody, but this is what's going to happen first, this is what's going to happen. I said that I felt that money was really the first thing we had to do in parallel to getting all our tax and all our legal documents in shape. Part of it was that the state CCOF form had been submitted in '85, and I discovered in November that there was a three-year window before you became in violation of the state law. So there was no '86 and there was no '87, and that window closed on January 31, or 30th—at the end of the month of January. So I had 60 days to file two years' worth of state forms, and then throw our reputation to the wind and at the mercy of the feds, because when you filed for state non-profit, they communicated with the feds, saying, OK—so we were probably illegal by the next year relative to the feds' annual returns. But I chose to do the state and federal at the same time and get that federal return in by the end of January, and then Mark's—let Bob take care of it—but actually, Mark then ... OK, I'll work with Phil McGee to get the renewals out. They will bring in some money later on in the spring. I'm leaving in February, but we'll work on ... I met Brendan Bohannon, and he agreed to do some certification work while we tried to hire a new certification coordinator. You can say whether he was going to school or not, but that felt like a plan, right there. Just those macro—I'll deal with money, I'll deal with the law, the feds, and the returns. Mark's got certification covered. He's got the handbook covered, such that it was. He's working on the materials list, and we've got—I think we had our first computer then. We got a computer, and we're going to transition into a computer print-out for certification forms. That was a big decision as well. So, great, Mark's got it covered; don't need to worry about anything until February.

RK: When did the earthquake happen then?

BS: That was a year later.

ML: That was a couple years later, it was '89.

BS: Yeah, '88.

ML: That was early '88 you're talking about.

BS: Eighteen months later.

RK: Go ahead and talk a little bit about the earthquake recovery, and then I want to move towards the Organic Act.

BS: So the day of the earthquake, I had just picked up our second computer. It was a brand new IBM 386 clone. I got it, literally had just brought it in the door that afternoon, gotten it set up, and was just starting to figure out, OK, let's put these floppy disks in and start loading our database, and then the earthquake happened.

ML: There's no direct correlation. [Both laugh]

BS: To loading the floppy disks and setting off the...

ML: San Andreas Fault.

BS: Large crack opened up in the wall next to my desk. We were on the third floor of this building and our entrance was up the back side of the building, up this metal fire escape, and I stood in that doorway and watched all these plate glass windows exploding on either side of me out into the parking lot.

RK: So you were in the building while it was going on.

BS: Yeah, me and Zea Sonnabend and Brian Baker.

ML: And Karen O'Connell.

BS: And Karen O'Connell.

RK: You all got out OK—did the computer survive?

BS: The computer did survive. [All chuckle]

ML: When Bob described earlier going in and picking up all the pieces and the files, yeah, the computer was still intact. I think that maybe the monitor broke.

BS: I remember the next day, I think. It was epic getting back from Reno, but I remember Mark saying, pretty cranky, that when the first big one was done and the gaps in the fire escape, and Karen like—I'm out of here, and I'm out of the state and I'm out of ... just evacuating, that Brian Baker went back to work and was starting to try to get some certificates printed out, and the computer working or something, because certification—now you're in the October zone. But I'd like to ... where was AB-2012 in that timeframe?

RK: What is AB-2012?

ML: So In the wake of the carrot caper and the Alar episode and demand for organic going ballistic, retailers everywhere saying—people want organic! Well, we can't get organic but let's just call it that. And that was happening all over the place, so there was very clearly a serious need for getting a grip on enforcement of this sort of vestigial state law that had been on the books in the health and safety code. At the same time that summer there had been the apple maggot episode. In California there was a fruit fly pest called the apple maggot, and these mandatory spray programs were being imposed on growers all over the state, and the organic guys up in Humboldt County and Mendocino County said—we're organic; you're going to take away our livelihood by forcing these prohibited chemicals on us. And so that made its way to the assembly agriculture committee in Sacramento, and the ag interests that controlled the committee said—let's get that organic thing out of the way and re-write it so the Department of Food and Agriculture can just decide what organic is and make it OK for us to impose these mandatory spray programs. Because we can't have these guys hanging out here and there, not treating for this pest and God knows what will happen. So we had to head that off and not let them just re-write the state law. But in order to do that it was clear we had to seize the initiative and become advocates for our own re-write and create an enforcement program. So I got charged by the board with that process and assembled a committee of senior growers to guide us in that process. So we already had the beginnings of that underway. We had talked to Sam Farr. He said, yes, I'll sponsor this; I'll carry the bill. And we'd started having meetings in Sacramento before the earthquake, and we had hired Barry Epstein, an attorney in San Francisco, to be our lobbyist in Sacramento. I had been going back and forth up to Sacramento to work on this, and all of a sudden you couldn't get to Sacramento. The Bay Bridge was broken, the freeway in Oakland had collapsed and was broken. It was very, very difficult to get around. It would take hours and hours and hours—all day—to go from Santa Cruz to Sacramento. But we kept it going. I worked in Barry's office in San Francisco. I slept on the couch in Sam Farr's office in Sacramento while we were doing various meetings there. So we were proceeding to re-write, total overhaul, of the state law in California to create this registration and enforcement program, while the federal law was starting to be discussed and starting to take shape. So Bob and I were simultaneously working these coalitions and negotiations, both in Sacramento and around California and also in Washington and nationally, and trying to share as much information between those two processes as we could, but we didn't know that either one of them would succeed. We had to keep both of these tracks going at the same time. It eventually turned out in the summer of 1990 that the overhaul of the state law passed first, in August of 1990—maybe September—right at the end of the legislative session. But it did end up passing with support of the farm groups, and the agriculture lobbies in Sacramento. That's a whole long story in itself, how we got there and how we built the political capital to be able to pull that off, because at that time ag was very, very powerful in Sacramento, and they didn't start out being at all favorable to what we were trying to do.

BS: Antagonistic.

ML: Yeah, and, of course, the office was all stacked up in Bob's house, around his front lawn, and so I was just working out of my car, basically. [Chuckles]

BS: Relative to the earthquake, we had refinanced the house and had doubled its size from a closet to two, if you will, and we were three days away from getting our occupancy permit, from the last inspection, and the earthquake happened, and they said months, maybe a year, because we've got to inspect a thousand houses in the city. So we took the back of the house and moved all the files back there, all across the floor, and set up sawhorses and a door as a desk, and then UCSC illegally gave us a closet at the Farm and Garden with a phone line, which was key, and Brian and Phil would go back and forth from the closet—that also had a fax machine—and to my house, and would take turns sitting at the desk and pulling out certificates and copying them for a wholesaler that needed a farmer's certificate, and printing out ... the computers were up there, but it was only one person—it was a closet, some kind of materials closet, and they took turns sitting in it. And Karen would come to the house. So we ran it that way for four months.

ML: And this was a period of intensive growth, following the pesticide scandals and the Chilean grape cyanide episode. There was just this hyper-intense interest in organic. So that was really the first kind of rocket ship acceleration.

BS: One other thing to all of this was the media attention. This was a period—I tried to be the spokesperson. If the questions were sophisticated or production, I'd say—Mark, would you take this interview? But, basically, I saw it as my job to be the spokesperson for the organization, and there'd be a call, it started out a call a week, and into this time and into the next year, it was sometimes it could be an interview or two a day. The TV crews from San Francisco or Monterey would be around with another story or a farmer going organic or claims that we weren't good, so there was a ... *Yumiuri Shimbun*, Tokyo, on line one. *Wall Street Journal* on two. *New York Times*, often. Heady and intense. If I say one wrong thing—what is the sound bite? What do I want to just say in a...? And by-and-large I felt very comfortable. Then I'd say—Mark, how did that sound? Well, you didn't say this, or you should have, you know. He was a good listener to keep me in line, but overall ... and Brammer, of course, the president at the time. I think Bill spoke as a farmer, and what it means to me in the soil and sales. So I think we were a good team. Then it was—all yours, Mark, just kind of switching. You run the whole lobbying show, you run the legislation. Tell me what resources you need, get the group organized. I'll do the sound bites, if need be. Let's do a lobby day, and, oh, by the way, now it looks like there's going to be congressional legislation.

RK: So at the same time you were working on a state organic act, there was an effort happening with Kathleen Merrigan, Senator Leahy, and others in Washington, right?

ML: Correct. So, as I was saying, both of those were moving simultaneously. We didn't know if either one of them would pass, let alone both. We just figured we'd have to cross that bridge when it happened, figuring out what would happen if they both passed. It turned out that they did both pass, but the implementation of the federal law would take, what, twelve years. And in the meantime, the California law became the de facto national standard. California Health and Safety Code 269.1—262,265,26569.11. [Chuckles] That was the label claim that was most used nationwide. California became the de facto national standard in that interim while the federal law was being implemented.

RK: Just to get this on the record—and that standard being what, like the length of time for organics, what materials were allowed, or what did that cover?

ML: Yeah, well it was still a more prescriptive hard divide between natural and synthetic materials, didn't have the option of including some allowed synthetics and excluding some not-OK naturals. That was one of the design features of the federal law that reflected sort of learning the lessons from how the state law worked or was limited. But, the thing about that was it was a very clear, bright line for consumers to understand what the definition of organic was based on, and that was absolutely essential to its success and validity in the marketplace.

BS: The enforcement, the fact that we had already engaged. The carrot caper had catalyzed this whole enforcement conversation, but now there were other smaller cases. People all the way down—you'd hear stories of certified organic farmer in a farmers market, at least in California, seeing the cardboard organic three booths down saying—can't do that anymore. Farmers market manager—that grower is not certified, does not have paperwork, cannot prove that they've met the new state law.

ML: So the state law imposed a registration fee on growers and processors to create funding for enforcement. That enforcement was carried out by the state department of agriculture for the growers and health services for the processors. And then, on the growers' side, administered by the county agriculture commissioners—they were the front line, they became the front line of enforcement, which was a whole education and hearts and mind process in and of itself, but this was the structure to start giving some backbone to the standards. Didn't require certification, didn't require independent certification. In order to register you had to basically make an affidavit to the state that you were following the standards, but the CCOF board and the elders who were kind of guiding the process said—you know what? We don't want that to be a requirement, we want that to be the value-added that we provide.

BS: Not mandatory.

ML: And that will distinguish CCOF from essentially just registered with the state organic. Of course the federal law ended up being different. It required certification, and eventually that's what happened in California, as well, as that came on line.

RK: And that, as you pointed out, that took something like 12 years till 2002 before ... and much of that was a struggle over what materials would be allowed, and what could be called organic or not. Were you guys involved in that, too?

BS: Again, Mark, by orders of magnitude more than I was, I'd say, there were two more legal cases. One was MexAm Bananas, was a class action lawsuit filed in San Diego County, but it had Mexico's bananas went around the country. Molly O'Neill of the *New York Times* did a really big piece about this. That took a lot of my desk time to deal with that.

RK: They were not organic, coming in from Mexico.

BS: The suit was settled before they ... so there was, what do they say, a "no claims of ..."

ML: Admission of wrongdoing.

BS: Admission of wrongdoing, but two certifiers and two companies paid \$400,000, \$380,000, to settle. And then there was an apple case, apple juice and labeling case, in Sonoma County. That, too, was settled right before for tens of thousands. So you had, now, enforcement happening, and the word in the *New York Times*. Again, they, these group of growers, San Diego County, and I was a pulled quote there, too, and I got some grief for it—we don't need to be public for this—and I said—just the opposite! We need to stand up for certification and the accessibility of paperwork and protocol in this. Then you have the law in place, which was an amazing, amazing victory with string and bailing wire. Had never held a hearing in the House, because Stenholm was the head of the ag committee. Held one hearing in the Senate ag committee, and Senator Leahy was the chair, and we were, a number of us were there. I remember sitting in the room with that hearing, and Senator Harkin came, but the real surprise was Senator Cranston came, number two. So I remember Senator Leahy going—I mean, Senator Cranston, what are you doing here? Well, I've been to organic farms in California, and they asked me to support them, and I wanted to come to this hearing and put my ... and that, again, upped the ante and changed the whole conversation as to interests and power. And we ... I'd like Mark to talk a little bit more. I'm not sure how Roger Blobaum kind of strategized this, or he was just doing this in his job at the time, but Center for Science in the Public Interest and Roger Blobaum started holding organic two-day conferences in DC, and we finally all really met each other. There were workshops, we would meet, we'd do lobbying training, and to me that was, however intentional it might have been, that became the place where we heard New Englanders having their say. We heard Minnesota and the Midwest. Michael Fields and Keith Jones from Texas. That's where we all met, pretty much. So talk about that. All yours.

ML: One of the best acronyms ever—we had this consortium of growers from all across the country—was the Organic Farmers Associations Council—OFAC.

BS: Again, we raised some money for it, and I think OFAC money went through as an educational, and some of the early money that went through this paper thing called Organic Farming Research Foundation, as well.

ML: I mean, all kinds of players were getting involved. OFAC was the growers groups trying to get themselves aligned, but that wasn't the only set of players. There were all the nascent organic processing and distribution companies. The fresh produce associations—PMA, Produce Marketing Association, essentially conventional farm group, was very interested in what was going to happen with this federal law, so we were getting all kinds of interest from all different kinds of levels than we had really ever interacted with before.

RK: Is that where some of the groups like the Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Coalition came in, and some of that with it, or was that kind of on the periphery?

BS: It seems to me that everybody came in. Everybody had something to say, how Roger and Mark and Elizabeth Henderson ... Gene Kahn was critical to that period of time. How some of

these people sorted it out—I was probably a degree or two separated from it, because I had to keep everybody paid, just had to run the shop.

ML: SAC didn't really become closely involved until later in the implementation phase, when the first proposed rule was issued in 1997. By then Bob and I were both at OFRF. But it was the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture, actually, which was ... this was before the merger of the National Coalition and SAC to create NSAC. The National Coalition was where we were more anchored, or participating. And that became the forum for organizing around the first proposed rule in 1997, where we had the "big three" of irradiation and sewage sludge and potential for genetic engineering to be used in organic. So we formed an organic committee within the National Coalition, and we had a big meeting in DC in maybe January of '98, where we assembled the 66 points of darkness. That was our compendium of all the things that were wrong with the first proposed rule.

BS: Was that Michael Sligh's title?

ML: No, actually, I think it was mine. [Chuckles]

BS: Thanks, Mark.

ML: But Michael Sly and Elizabeth Henderson and myself were kind of the co-chairs of that group.

RK: I think Roger Blobaum was involved in that, too.

ML: Absolutely, yeah.

RK: Because when I talked with him about it this...

ML: Many people were involved.

RK: And I know in Minnesota Jim Riddle, who's a good farmer, was very much involved with it.

ML: He was there.

ML: Marty Mesh. Great pantheon of folks.

BS: I want to go back and just add one more just point in this. I've never really ... it's a visual of like Chinese chess boards stacked up with pieces moving here and pack this piece over here and up there. In this organic period of five years, there were also boards over here, incoming back there, attacks. But a key person that not that many people know about, but Jack Pandol, Senior was close to Steve and Tom Pavich. Pandol was known as setting up the original grower-packer-shipper arrangement with Chile, one of the inventors of the winter fruit market. He had a global business coming out of Delano, one of the big five grape growers, and he, after watching Steve and Tom put in about 40 acres of certified organic grapes, and he want ... We had a meeting with

Senator Cranston at UCSC with about 10 or 12 others to talk about the federal bill and see if Cranston would support it. We were asking for a letter; we didn't expect him to come to the meeting. And afterwards, Pandol said to me—I'll give you three chips if I can get invited to this meeting. I've never met him, I'm a personal friend of Reagan, I'm known, it's always ... but I want to meet this man; this would be a good common area to meet with him. So, OK, great, come to the meeting. And afterwards—and again, I can't remember—I think Deukmejian, it got to Deukmejian's desk, I think it was California was first. So I called up Mr. Pandol and asked him. We were worried all the way through that Deukmejian or anybody might stop it. I asked him if he would call Deukmejian personally, privately, to ask him on his behalf to support the bill. And I got him, I asked him, he called back a couple of days later and said—I reached him, I told him, and why, and he said he would sign it. That was chip one—I was so psyched. And then months later now we're going through Congress, and we have George H.W. Bush, and we were worried about him. We only won by a few votes in the House, DeFazio on the floor, and Stenholm and the Dems weren't all that happy, so I called him again and said—OK, would you call H.W. Bush? And he said—I'd be happy to. We like what we see in our parcel, and we think this is something we want to support. And there, about 10 days later, he said—I reached the president and I talked to him about it, and he said he would sign it if it got to his desk. I never got to use the third chip. But through the Paviches, really, it was Jack Pandol that got us to ... then it was OFRF, but we gave the very first organic panel at Ag Outlook in DC. We gave the very first organic panel at PMA, and over that time I or organic farmers spoke at the food marketing ... I mean it was really through Pandol in the beginning, and then Zaninovich and some of the carrot guys, and then eventually Drew and Myra at Earthbound. These were to-scale organic, and they went to their association saying—we're part of you; we pay membership. This is farming and we're farmers, and you should support this. Mark used that and others incredibly effectively just a few years later as these rules issues. These guys—we didn't come this far and get certified organic to allow sewage sludge to come onto our ... It was very quiet but helpful political addition to our more public uprising.

RK: Well, I want to, while I have you both on the couch, as it were, I would like to have you talk about the formation of the Organic Farming Research Foundation, how that came about, and you both involved many years of your lives in it. I'd like to hear about how that got going and want to talk about its purpose and, again, some accomplishments.

BS: The initiation was the near daily assessment of bankruptcy of CCOF and trying to figure out where more money was going to come from and going to Susan Clark from the Columbia Foundation, asking her if she could give CCOF a grant, and it was Susan that looked across the table to me and said—we'd be very pleased to give the first grant to a new organization that I know you can found, Bob. You go out and create a sister foundation, sort of like Friends of the Earth and Friends of the Earth Foundation. You go found that, and we'd be proud to make the first grant.

RK: So that would be a (c)(3)?

BS: Correct.

RK: And she'd be able to give to it as a foundation.

BS: Correct. So Mark Nielsen, Warren Weber, and, to a lesser extent, Patty LaBoyteaux were the three farmers that worked with me to found it and get the paperwork. Nielsen, by orders of magnitude, he kind of wrote the proposals, he wrote the bylaws—Warren helped—but we got it in place and got the paperwork and got the (c)(3), and I swear within 48 hours I'd gotten that to Susan Clark, and within a week or two Susan got a \$20,000 grant back to us. And this was just to pay—again, we're in arrears and missing paychecks—was to pay the CCOF staff. We did it under the guise of Brian Baker and the educational work. We made up timesheets, so everybody at CCOF was doing this much education, this much outreach, and the other parts were (c)(5) work. And then we rolled.

ML: Nonetheless, the mission of the organization wasn't a throw-away or just sort of a façade. We worked on the mission and goals while still at CCOF in 1990.

BS: I would say Mark did most of ... Mark Lipson did most of that work with Mark Nielsen and Warren. Again, I'm like—tell me what to do.

ML: The improvement and widespread adoption—that was our mission of organic agriculture. That came out of just seeing the complete absence of institutional support for any kind of science that would tell us how to farm better, organically. We didn't even know what we were doing right. We knew it could work; we knew organic farming worked, and we had some principles from Albert Howard and Eve Balfour and J. I. Rodale, but getting to the next level of really understanding what's going on in these systems—almost nobody doing that science. So we decided ... you know, the growers at CCOF said—well, we're going to have to do it for ourselves. And so even though we had sort of this urgent need to have some kind of vehicle, the rationale for what that vehicle was absolutely rooted in the reality of the absence of institutional scientific support.

RK: I remember the discussions around how important it was to have, from your perspective, the farmers actually even driving what research needed to be done, and the controversy around that with the land grants, who didn't necessarily think that's where the priorities are selected.

ML: Yeah, get farmers involved at all!

RK: Right, and that's remained, though, a solid principle, I think, the on-farm research. That's one area of real progress, I think, over the past few decades, is that it's still a small part of the federal budget, but...

BS: The systems, on-farm. I'd say we went about 18 months of successful fundraising grants, right through to CCOF, but relatively quickly, even within that 18 months, one or two board members—it was almost all CCOF growers—one or two non-CCOF growers on the OFRF board, but ... OK, we have enough; let's start making on-farm grants—let's go for it. And Carl Rosato's brown leaf peach curl, alternative approaches to managing that, I think, was the first OFRF on-farm grant. Carl had some ideas on how to treat leaf curl, and I remember—this is one of the clearer memories of sitting there going wow! I've raised this money. We got salaries, we got a little bit ahead, and now I'm writing \$2,300, just giving it away to this farmer, because the

board wants to, and both feeling like this could be really something great! And—God, I’ve got to go raise \$2,300 more money to cover that [Chuckles], that we didn’t really have in the budget. But it was very, very quick—within a year or two we had raised even more. And, of course, we had the first organic business and regulatory conference. We had done an organic farmer survey to the nation, saying—hey, we’re going to start funding on-farm research. What is the research priorities that this board should look at? We transitioned out more CCOF growers, we brought on other farmers from around the country and started to make 8 or 10 grants a year, with farmers who ... I wanted to bottle their conversations, because I could make a million dollars. They were so brilliant, and it was grounded in their experiences, matched with the first 10 or 12 papers that they had ... I read this in this paper, I saw this in this publication, and then I tried it, and this didn’t work. Or it did work, but we don’t know why. It’s time to fund that project. And then, what, ’95, ’94 we got the idea to, maybe...

ML: Well, I’d left CCOF in ’93. I wanted to farm full-time...

BS: Enough of this office stuff.

ML: ... and I had to build a house, and so those ... I took a couple of years away from the non-profit side of things. In the meantime, Bob had left CCOF to become the E.D. of OFRF, but...

BS: For a year, that was in our closet at my home with Erica and another staffer. So we ran it for a year out of my house.

ML: It was clear very early-on that this foundation was a good idea and really needed, but also that we would only ever be working with very, very small amounts of money, relative to what agricultural research usually required. And so we started having this conversation about, well, you know, the federal government puts a lot of money into agricultural research. Maybe we should think about how we get some of that.

BS: It was Ken Cook. Ken Cook and David Katz, I think, were talking to various other funders...

ML: Benbrook.

BS: Actually he was also...

ML: People were interested in starting to talk about federal policy for organic in the wake of passing the Organic Foods Production Act in 1990, which originally had a research title in it, and then that got dropped out in the negotiating process. In the transition from Senate to House, that whole part of the original Organic Foods Production Act got lost, which was sort of one of the really important forks in the road. So we still didn’t have anything in terms of public institutional support for organic research and extension, so we started formulating an idea for looking for some funding to do a project that would start analyzing that. And Ed Miller from C. S. Mott Fund—I don’t know how we connected with that originally.

BS: That was before the sustainable ag food systems funders, there was a sector group at EGA, of about five foundations.

ML: Environmental Grant Makers.

BS: Environmental Grant Makers, and they invited me to speak at an EGA meeting, and invited me to go for beers afterwards with the sector group, and Ed Miller was one of them. Just what do you do—talking about it. What are your exciting ideas? Said, well, here's one.

ML: So eventually Ed came out to California. This is early 1995 or summer of '95, and Ed and Bob and I sat at the dining room table at my unfinished house that we hadn't quite moved into yet, and created this project that then brought me to OFRF as a staff person, December of '95.

RK: As a policy analyst.

ML: As a, yeah, policy analyst. And what we did was started using this internet thing, and for the first time you could get access to the database of federal agricultural research grants. The current research information system, the CRIS database, was on a website hosted by the Library of Congress. So we got an AOL account and a dial-up modem, and started going through the research database, looking for research that was specific to organic farming systems. And so we started assembling this study, which eventually we titled "Searching for the O-word," but it was analysis of the CRIS database, looking for organic research and trying to distinguish stuff that had sort of IPM and less intensive pesticide use as its goals, as distinct from full-blown organic systems, without the use of these materials and with natural fertility as the basis of production. So with a fair amount of rigor, we basically flag it is about one-tenth of one percent of one year's worth of federal research outlays for agricultural research and extension. That became the platform for going to Congress and saying—we want our fair share. We think there should be something specific to organic agriculture in the federal research portfolio, and right now you're not doing it, and in the meantime these businesses are succeeding and growing and they are a legitimate constituency.

RK: That led, then, ultimately, to the LISA program?

ML: No.

BS: Totally different.

ML: LISA had already been underway from the late-'80s. I mean, this whole debate over sustainable agriculture research went back to the early 1980s, and the outcome of Garth Youngberg's study, before he got fired by John Block—I guess, along with you—and the SARE program had been reformulated in the 1990 Farm Bill, and started to get a little bit of money. So that was just barely showing up in the database by the time we were looking at it for the 1995 research year.

RK: So some of the stuff in that SARE then would have qualified under your *Looking for the O-Word*, but not all of it?

ML: Some of it did, right, and in fact it was still a very small handful, but within that handful, maybe even the majority of it was SARE funded.

BS: A quick back-story in this conversation about doing this kind of work, again, it was some random meetings, timing. (Chuck) Benbrook had, I think, been fired by then, after his landmark report on the National Academy of Sciences on alternative agriculture. He was kind of crashing around—this is absolutely outrageous! He was promoting another set of recommendations, kind of off Garth, in a much more academically sound and important way. I had known Ken Cook from before, when he was at Pacifica, you know, and I was fascinated by these EWG (Environmental Working Group) things, who'd come out and say—we analyzed this data, this governance ... and I started talking to him about it, and he said—oh, yeah, we get this ... and Richard Wiles, and they explained to me how they did some of these data-mining projects. It was fascinating, and maybe just for my own edification, but this was kind of parked when Mark and I started talking. Mark said—yeah, there's this CRIS system, and maybe we can find some organic research. Do you think you could do it? This is what EWG has already started to do—could we do this, too? It didn't take Mark [snaps fingers]—yeah, that's really cool. Again, I think your brilliance was to take the idea and, yeah, we can do this. But it was like 72 key words. There's an implementation of these ideas, and Mark and a team, or we had some advisors, sat down and said—here's all the words that would at least open the door to a report we should look at further. And we had a night crew that would come into our little office space that would do some of this stuff. We paid hourly, and they would come in. We'd get reports in the morning they had found 23 more.

ML: Ronnie Bramwell.

BS: Ronny, and Sierra. So, again, we had people—I want to be part of this. We had these kids coming off the farm and others looking for work, and that, then, set the stage. Jessie Smith Noyes came in. Ed was really pleased with it; he got it. And then we wanted to do more; we wanted to do policy, and they renewed. Vic DeLuca said—this is the kind of ... I want to join ... I want to match them. So by then we had a pretty good amount of money, and really, I think, revealed a more sophisticated policy program with the set of objectives that Mark was so primed to take the next level.

ML: So, *Searching for the O-word* came out in '97, summer of '97, I think.

BS: Look at me—my memory is ... pretty vague...

ML: And that was almost exactly coinciding with the release of the first proposed rule on implementing the Organic Foods Act, the first NOP rule, which was just very, very deeply rejected by the organic community, and became this huge organizing effort. Interestingly, it was also another internet first. It was the first time that the federal government used the internet to allow comments on rules published in the *Federal Register*. So we just immediately kind of broke the needle.

BS: All hands on internet deck.

ML: By the time the comment period closed, it was over 270,000 comments that had been received, and the only thing even close to it ever was a proposal from the FDA to regulate tobacco as a drug. This was astonishing to people in Washington, of course, and instantly created some political capital...

BS: Who are these guys?

ML: ... and that played out in terms of bringing the *Searching for the O-word* report to Congress. Sam Farr and Pat Leahy and Tom Harkin started saying—hey, look at this report; we're not supporting this industry, and people notice that, and so the '97 research title, which had been split off from the '96 farm bill actually had a provision in it authorizing any appropriations that might be able to be made for an organic research program. No such appropriations came along until 2001, I'm pretty sure, but nonetheless, we had a toe-hold in federal policy that that was the point at which we went beyond the Organic Foods Production Act into other spheres of federal policy. Then eventually in 2001 there was a small appropriation made for organic research discretionary grant program, and then in the 2002 Farm Bill, the Organic Research and Extension Initiative took a more formal structure, or acquired a more formal structure and had \$5 million in mandatory expenditures over the life of that farm bill, grew to \$70 million in the 2008 Farm Bill.

BS: It was a four-year bill, maybe.

ML: Eighty million, or \$100 million, I guess, over five years in the 2014 Farm Bill. So that was the trajectory of creating this little analytical project at the dawn of the internet age and moving it through both inside work and grassroots pressure from organic farmers themselves, creating this piece of the federal research apparatus dedicated to organic. So now that's added up to well over a quarter of a billion dollars in organic research over its life, now.

RK: And Organic Farming Research Organization has continued to do investigations as one of its functions into how those, where those research dollars are going, right? Sort of the *Searching for the O-word* going forward.

BS: The national organic research agenda, a more sophisticated manner, analysis of some ... and others, too, analyses of these grants and who is getting them and what's ... the key thing is how the information is then disseminated back into the actual producer community. It was always real important to us. You know how serendipity ... a couple of key moments in all of this. Brise couldn't remember, either, if you were there. By then our board president was a farmer from Iowa, Ron Rosmann, and Ron and I, and I know Brise was in the room—I don't know you were out on leave or not—but we had a meeting with Senator Harkin and his chief of staff ...

ML: Yeah, I was there.

BS: You were there, yeah. We were, like, OK, wow—ag committee head, chief of staff—power meeting. Ron said—Iowa is small, I go to ... I'm a Democrat. But he never really told me that when we went into the meeting, the first 10 minutes Tom and Ron were—how's Maria, how's the kids ... that Harkin had introduced Ron to his wife, 30-some-odd years before, and it was a personal, direct family request. I'm here, and then, Ron, I'm president of this board; I'd like Bob

and Mark and Brise to talk. I did the sound bite, and Mark and Brise—this is what we want; this is really important. Brise tells me that he took it all in, just told me a couple of months ago, and that he looked out and he said—this is so unusual for me, you know, organic, Iowa, particularly to be the co-sponsor—will this work? Brise said—I think she was still in Monterey, or she said—I just looked around and then all of a sudden you, Bob, leaned forward and said—I guarantee it. I don't remember anything. I have no clue, but she's learned to be a good storyteller, too, so ... I'll repeat Brise telling what I said to...

ML: [Chuckles]

BS: But we all nodded, said—yeah. Of course, Ron was really—I'd been working ... now I am certified organic, and it is working, and I need the resources and information and I'm not getting it from extension in my own state.

RK: Senator Harkin's on my short list. He doesn't know it, but I'm hoping he'll be willing to be interviewed, too, because of his contributions to this.

BS: I still get Christmas cards from him, so I think he's keeping that list going. So that's, in a ... I can't on film and to Mark's face and to you all speak often and highly enough of the role Mark has played, and the strategic and the intellectual underpinning of many of these conversations over the years. He's just there, he's quick, and can counter just about any debate back against us, OFRF, him, and the organic movement, and another time and place. It's actually on film, about eight places Sam Farr tells hilarious stories of Mark changed the entire state legislature and won the day.

ML: In my overalls. [Laughs]

BS: In his overalls, yeah. Sam has to always add a clothing option, I mean a clothing optional. Had to add—Mark in his overalls in a suit and tie environment. But Mark's the man.

ML: Which is completely imaginary.

BS: Yeah, I'm glad Sam has that little ... I'm with him on—the memory I have is. But in Brise re-telling that story, she says—God, I'm just here, and I look to you, and she says—you were so forceful, you just leaned forward ... I said—Brise, I have no recollection, but if you want to tell it some more, I'd like to hear it again.

RK: Well, this has been wonderful, and I really appreciate getting this firmer understanding of these past struggles and ultimate victories. And if I may, I'd like to, each of you talk a little bit about, sort of, now what? What haven't you got, what are the frontiers that are still in front of us? What are the challenges now for organics and, more broadly, for sustainable agriculture that you think should be either that you'll continue to work on or that you're hoping that your protégées will work on?

BS: I'm also on a time clock now with something Judy texted me about, but I'd say for me I'm productively retired for six years now, and I'd still give some presentations—not nearly as many

as I used to. I think we need a reality check. However exciting organic is and how it's in the global trade and the supermarkets, a dose of cold water, that it's four-and-one-half percent of the food economy, and that the structural integration of certified organic products into the food system after 37 years of my work, there's still 96 percent of the food economy to go, brother. And the heroes of the future are the students, the 25-year-olds in the classrooms or in the farms or at the conferences that are charged with taking it to 40 or 50 percent. And in doing that, conventional ag is not going to go lightly. They're not going to ... some will transition, some, but the ... as you've seen with the concentration in seeds and chemical companies, others are going to feel even more threatened, and it's going to be incredibly challenging to grow this to that scale, I think. I'm concerned about genetic engineering. My thing these days is synthetic biology and CRISPER and gene drives in applications in conventional farming systems. I don't know how future organic activists are really going to address those tools that are all around their/our organic farms. So keep on keeping on right now. Let's get it four to eight to twelve, and do it step-by-step and region-by-region. All yours.

ML: Well, mostly I think these days about the future that it's not ours to figure out, and we have to get the youngsters to own it for themselves. There's a lot of disaffection among younger, newer farmers for the organic certification system. It's not as widespread as the media sometimes makes it out to be, or the more vocal voices make it out to be. But they didn't participate in the creation of it, and so they don't necessarily feel like they own it as their own. So...

RK: So they resent having to sort of pay ...

ML: Well, there's a couple different dynamics going on there. I think they are also more individualistic. We were raised and came of age in a time when collective action was just taken for granted. That was what we were steeped in. I don't think that is as true now. And so it isn't just the certification that there is disaffection from, it is also the organizations that we created. And the need is for the next couple generations to understand that and appreciate it for what it is, but to also own it and be able to make it their own. Whenever I'm talking to a group of younger farmers and activists, I say—this doesn't have to be your parents' organic. You do have to understand the history, and you have to respect it, but you can make it your own and it could be really different. My cohort has become very largely sort of reactionary and fundamentalist, and I think that's in the way. I think we have to get out of the way for the younger generation to own it and make it their own, figure out how they're going to move it forward into the 21st Century of the climate emergency and everything else that they have to deal with. I think the great hope is that organic agriculture can be the basis for this massive re-pooling of carbon in the soil. So in some ways what organic has to do is return to its roots and codify that part of what organic means in a much deeper way, both literally and figuratively, and stop spending all the time fighting about what the National Organic Standards Board is going to put on the materials list. And figure out how organic is going to fulfill that promise and expectation and rise to the moment in terms of being the leading wedge of regenerating soils and ... You know, we've got to figure out how to let go of the organizational forms that we're attached to, that my generation's attached to, that we created 30, 40 years ago. Those do not need to be the most important thing to hold onto. But there is excessive attachment to them, and that's really in the way. So, we've got to do some letting go and help the next team pick up the threads.

RK: Very good.

BS: Bingo.

RK: To both of you, I really appreciate it.

Transcribed by
Carol C. Bender
WordCrafter
carolbender@msn.com
651-644-0474