

Bob Warrick
Narrator

Ron Kroese
Interviewer

February 16, 2017

Bob Warrick—BW
Ron Kroese—RK

RK: Today is February 16, and videographer Lonnie Hamilton and I are at the home of Bob Warrick and his wife Gudrun in Oceanside, California, where they retired in 2003. Today I am having a conversation with Bob about his long career as a Nebraska farmer, conservationist, and advocate for sustainable agriculture policies in Nebraska and in Washington, DC. And, Bob, your career certainly deserves a longer introduction than that, but we will cover, hopefully, almost everything I would have said in an introduction in our conversation, I hope. I'm thinking of these interviews as an archive and an opportunity to really have people in the future get to know these people who were so important to the formation of sustainable agriculture policies, really going all the way back to the '60s and '70s. So I really like to have people talk about themselves and what they were, how they got going, even, as children, or what motivated them from the very beginning of their lives to begin to think about agriculture, and, particularly as things went on, conservation and sustainable agriculture. And I have in my notes that you actually grew up on the farm that you still own, so that's a very interesting story. And as I understand, when you were a little boy, the Depression was still going on, and what was that like. Tell us about your upbringing.

BW: Well, in rural Nebraska during the Depression there was an old saying, and my mother said it, that the only thing they could raise were kids, [chuckle] so that's ... I have one brother, one sister. And in rural Nebraska, and it was tough. But, of course, I really don't remember the Depression that well, except that I ... it was dirty. We got a lot of that good Oklahoma red dust up there on the porch. I always remember that—when the wind blows from the south, why Oklahoma would come north. So I remember that, but other than that—actually, the farm still worked with horses, so ... there weren't that many tractors. And, of course, then the war started, World War II, and everything was in a great deal of flux. But luckily it was the start of very good years, in the '40s.

RK: Yeah, that's how it was with my grandfather, too. My mom talked about it, how it was so bad in like '36 that they thought they were going to lose the farm. But by the mid-'40s, or certainly even before World War II ended, things had already really turned around, so that was really the war—and the weather improved, too.

BW: Oh, yes, very much so.

RK: So then, as you grew up on the farm, then, you stayed in farming. I know you went off to the University of Minnesota—what did you major in?

BW: Nebraska.

RK: Excuse me, I said Minnesota—yeah, Nebraska. What did you learn there, what did you study?

BW: Not much. I was not a good student, but I stayed there four years and then left and went into the army and came out in the early '60s. I remember coming home and actually my dad never—he was involved in agriculture—it was my grandfather that was involved in agriculture. And my great-grandfather homesteaded there. So both their parents fought in the Civil War, my grandfathers and my grandmothers, but on opposite sides. One was in the Union Army, and the other one was in the Confederacy, and they had a tough time getting married. But when they did, my grandfather, then, went into a local business in this small town, Meadow Grove. The railroad came through, it went out to Lander, Wyoming, and things really boomed. That was very good times, up till World War I. He bought land and had renters on it and a hired man. So I grew up in what would be considered in rural Nebraska as a pretty successful family. People were building during, before World War I, and he bought land and people traded land. It's just amazing to look through all his records, how people would borrow—no qualms at all about borrowing all kinds of money on their land. That's how they survived.

RK: And then when you got out of the army, you decided to go, to make...

BW: Well, I was going to go to school, back to the university, but my dad said—look we've got all this land out here, why don't you start farming, and you could run the agricultural land and my brother would run the local grain elevator and hardware business in town. So that's what we did.

RK: And then you knew Gudrun not too long after that, or right in there somewhere, too?

BW: Yeah, we formed a family corporation that involved ... a family corporation—you could incorporate in Nebraska that way. I was giving up hope finding a Nebraska girl that wanted to live on the farm. I met this woman who came from Germany, and she was in Eisenhower's People to People Program. And they brought them over, the State Department did, and paid for their trip, and would take them through Washington, DC, New York City, Chicago, but then they wanted to come out and do something that they wanted to always see, and my wife grew up being the daughter of a German officer in the German army. He was a cavalry officer and he rode jumpers and rode in the '36 Olympics that was held in Berlin. So she grew up riding horses, and she always wanted to ride a western saddle. She just couldn't understand how anyone could stand riding a western saddle. They searched around, and she stayed with a Rotary family, Rotary International, and that's how I met her, and I took her horseback riding.

RK: And that won her heart.

BW: Well...

RK: And she was willing to move out to the farm.

BW: Well, after some persuading by mail, which is the only way we ... no phone, no Skypes, no anything, you know. You had cable, but it was so terrible, cables to Europe were just terrible, so it was letters, letters. Married in Germany, brought her back after the end of her school—she was teaching in Germany, of course, at that time, elementary education.

RK: That's a wonderful story.

BW: Well, one of the things that makes you particularly special for the interviews I'm doing is there are some other farmers I'm interviewing that were also involved with the National Sustainable Ag Coalition, but one of the things I'd like to have you talk about is the fact that you were actually a farmer, and you were trying to do these conservation methods and things on your farm. So I'd like you to talk a little bit—I know you raised hogs, you had cattle—what was your farm like?

BW: Well, it was ... the actual farming enterprise of it wasn't that big. It was mainly a lot of pasture, typical northern plains prairies around there that we ran cattle on, and so that was primarily, my source of income was raising hogs and cattle.

RK: You didn't do a lot of row cropping then?

BW: We didn't have a lot of row crops. I didn't. But I always tried to raise enough row crops and corn and oats so I could raise hogs. Because my dad said the only way we'd pay the mortgage off is with hogs. That's historically how farmers worked, because hogs were always seemingly a profit-generating enterprise. He said—if you're going to farm, you're going to raise hogs. That was it. But I got to like hogs. They're a smart animal, they respond good to care, and it was kind of interesting to get into the hog business. And then later on, why I got hooked up with Niman Ranches. I don't know if you've ever heard of Niman Ranches or not.

RK: I go to Chipotle—I've heard of Niman Ranches.

BW: That's right—well they've got their own packing plant up in northwest Iowa that they harvest, process all their hogs. You sign a contract with Niman. Most of the hogs are shipped to California, because Niman was raised in California, and he knew that California wasn't getting very good meat, especially pork, and so he thought, boy, there's a market out here for good pork, and there was.

RK: So you were probably an early supplier for that whole thing.

BW: Well, yeah, I was ... but I got to know some farmers in Iowa that were big Niman hog producers, and I still know them. I go back and visit them, and it's kind of interesting how he got me hooked up with Niman and they were ... it was quite profitable to be hooked up with Niman, because they gave you a premium if you raised the right kind of hogs, they would give you a premium for it.

RK: This wasn't something I'd actually planned to talk about, but I've got to kind of touch on it, because I know that one of the things that you've been concerned about is the growth of big animal confinements, big CAFOs.

BW: That's right.

RK: So you were able to raise hogs in a method that would...

BW: Niman forbid CAFOS. He said—you raise these hogs in a natural environment, either A-sheds out on pastures or ... so at least they're on dirt lots. Niman was very careful about that. No antibiotics. Natural breeding.

RK: And you were able to put the manure, then, back onto your pastures.

BW: That's right. In fact I just talked to one of my beginning farmers—I was in the Beginning Farmer Program, and I've got these beginning farmers now that I started, and they're still farming the land in Nebraska. And I said—Joe! I spread a lot of manure on some of this land. He says—you know, we had it soil tested this last year, and he said—no phosphorus.

RK: Yeah, don't need it.

BW: [Chuckles] Don't need it.

RK: That's very interesting. The other thing that I think, too, that later on in your life that became clear, was a lot of this land then never had really been plowed up, right? It remained in pasture, in grass, I mean.

BW: When I first got out of the military there was a lot of grasslands around. But then in the '70s yet, and center pivot irrigation moved in and these huge corporations were suddenly buying land out in the Sand Hills or in the transition zone between the farmland and the Sand Hills in Nebraska. This was the thinking ... raising corn, primarily, could make money. Well, it didn't work out. It was very marginal land—took a lot of water, took a lot of fertilizer, and lasted for, oh, most of them found out very shortly that some of the land was just unsuitable for it. But in our area there was a lot of center pivot put in. And I was not very happy, because this was not a sustainable system at all. It was very marginal, and I thought it was just ... I mean, corn, historically, in the Midwest had always been a crop that's been looking for markets. And desperate for markets. That was when the government, during World War II, put a price floor on everything, and subsidized corn growing. I remember the debate after the war ended that should these price support systems continue. By then there was such an organization backing corn production that there was no alternative but to continue those systems. And so they had, every small town in Minnesota and Iowa and Nebraska, had these big government grain bins they put up, and that's where they put all the corn. And it was a money making thing for grain elevators, which my dad ran, the grain elevator. He just put up these big bins as fast as he could. Plus we had all the government bins. Then suddenly in the late '50s the government decided—oh, we're going to get out of the corn business. So they dumped it all on the markets. [Chuckles] That's

when the big shift in trying to find a support system for farmers that had been wedded to corn for most of their life suddenly found that they had very, very poor markets.

RK: Well, and that's something that doesn't go away, either.

BW: No, it doesn't.

RK: It comes and goes.

BW: No, it doesn't.

RK: I know a lot of people are worried right now that the new administration and the threat to tariffs and everything, it could just upset the flow of corn and beans to other parts of the world.

BW: That's right.

RK: So these things don't go away.

BW: Suddenly the Trump administration doing away with the Pacific trade agreements—boy the agriculture was not too happy about that. But you never heard much about that, especially in an urban area like this, because agriculture, as far as commodities go, they aren't very knowledgeable. The politics aren't that strong. But out in Nebraska, Minnesota, and Iowa, I'm just amazed that they stayed Republican, [Both chuckle] because of that.

RK: I want to move forward here with some other things. One of the things, when we first met back in the early '80s, I associated you with a couple of organizations that you played important roles in. One of them was the Center for Rural Affairs.

BW: Right.

RK: And how did you get involved with them. They, at that time, were in Walthill, Nebraska, a group trying to work on the issues of maintaining some ... finding ways to improve rural life and improve agriculture.

BW: I went to one of the Center's board meetings. They were such a—I don't know how you would call it—dialectic group. Is that an appropriate word?

RK: Yup.

BW: They were—it was really amazing. I was just fascinated, because in rural Nebraska you just don't run into people like that too often.

RK: Right.

BW: But I helped in some of my environmental work stop a proposed dam on the Niobrara River up there, and I remember Marty Strange, who was one of the co-directors of the Center for

Rural Affairs, rode up with me. And we had all these ranchers, very conservative ranchers, that were fighting the federal government against putting this proposed irrigation project. And, of course, all the developers up there were in favor of it.

RK: Oh, yes.

BW: And Marty said—why don't you get on the board of the Center; we need somebody like you. So that was the beginning—Marty asked me to.

RK: I see, yes. And by that time you were already involved in ... was it with the Sierra Club, then, too, you were already...

BW: Yeah, I helped form the Nebraska ...

RK: How did you get ... you know there's not a lot of people that associate farmers and Sierra Club. How did that happen?

BW: Well, when I was at the university I met a young man from California, and he wanted me to go skiing. So I went out to Colorado with him and put on a pair of skis. It was the first time I'd ever skied in my life, and I really got hooked. I always liked to camp out and hike, but hiking in the mountains is a whole different thing, so I just got hooked on that and got into the environmental movement and got to know ... and then I helped form the Nebraska Chapter because of that, because of my interest in canoeing and hiking and backpacking. So we formed the Nebraska Chapter and it kind of grew from there.

RK: One of the things I wanted to put on the record here was I did an interview a month or so ago in San Francisco with Ken Cook from the Environmental Working Group, who, earlier in his career, was also very involved in the development of conservation policies and things like that, going back into the '80s. And he told me that he thinks of you as the person, more than anyone else, who was able to convince the Sierra Club that agriculture ought to be important to them and Sierra Club should play a role in the development of agriculture policies because of its impact on the environment.

BW: Yeah, I have the deepest respect for Ken, because he was in Washington and worked with the, formed the Environmental Working Group, and was quite instrumental in showing how these subsidies distorted farming and farm prices and the whole government system of helping farmers out. Ken was very good about that. So when I went to the Sierra Club—this was back in the '80s when we had this depression in agriculture.

RK: Coming off the Earl Butz “get-big or get big” years.

BW: Right, and we had these, the tractorcades to Washington, farmers protesting low prices.

RK: Right.

BW: Well, the problem was that most of that wasn't focused on conservation. And I just, I thought to myself—here I am, working in the Sierra Club, and I just thought I would go to ... I went to some board meetings in San Francisco of the Sierra Club, and I thought—you know, there could be an opportunity here for the Sierra Club to get involved in farm policy and conservation policy at the same time. Because every four years, why we write a new farm bill, so I convinced conservation director, I thought, at that time, to consider this. And the board of directors of the Sierra Club liked the idea. They put a lot of money into hiring staff and developing a program and then having a big meeting up at the Wingspread...

RK: In Wisconsin.

BW: Right, in Wisconsin, to put together these policies. And Ken came along and we actually sat down and wrote agricultural policy then for the farm bill.

RK: The '85 Farm Bill?

BW: For the '85 Farm Bill. Yes.

RK: Just to set the context, out of the earlier, a little bit earlier in the '80s, at the tail end, actually, of the Carter administration and Bob Bergland as Secretary of Agriculture, some reports had come out, one in particular, *A Time to Choose*, drew public's attention and policymakers' attention to the severe erosion problems that were happening in the United States. And also the impact of that erosion on the water quality and all of this. And I think that stimulated the whole effort to get on that issue.

BW: That's right. So we sat and thought up policy alternatives. We thought at that time that we might as well go for what is called the whole enchilada and get everything we can in this farm bill. Be the biggest conservation act since the '36 Depression and Roosevelt's big New Deal, as far as agriculture goes.

RK: And you were right, I mean...

BW: And it was right, and the time was right.

RK: Got the Conservation Reserve Program, the Wetlands Reserve Program, a whole number of programs were initiated during that ... in there.

BW: Yes, just amazing.

RK: And that was a very fertile time, and you actually testified, didn't you? Do you remember any things about that?

BW: I did.

RK: One of the other things, then, is part of this work you did with the Sierra Club and getting it interested in agriculture, and also working with the Center for Rural Affairs was being involved

in the formation of the Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, which then created another vehicle for the need for advocacy and activists like you to take part. And so you did that, and it did lead to some significant policy changes that came in the '85 Farm Bill. So talk a little bit about that.

BW: That's right. Well, I should probably mention that I was also on the local soil and water conservation district board.

RK: That's right.

BW: And that really kind of shaped my ideas as far as putting conservation on the land and working with the federal government, as far as accomplishing soil protection, water quality. Of course, the Soil Conservation Service, which administered those programs, was formed under Roosevelt and the New Deal, back in the '30s. So that was really a high point as far as I was concerned, because I wanted to get involved in protecting my own land, but also getting farmers involved in protecting their land. Then I could see, after being with the Soil and Water Conservation Program, which was all voluntary—there was no mandatory programs at all—that I said, look, we've got to take the next step, that we've got all these USDA employees out there that are trying to convince farmers to do the right thing, and we've got to give them the carrot, but also have the stick. And the conservation compliance section of the farm bill did that, under the Conservation Act of 1985.

RK: Exactly, and that was ... I'm really glad you brought that up; that became, that was called Sodbuster, and there was another one called Swampbuster, where they basically said the quid pro quo here is you do a good job on your land, and...

BW: You protect water, you protect soil, but also it said that you develop a whole-farm plan that the soil conservation sits down with you and develops a whole-farm plan to protect your soil. And this was, I thought, really the key. The problem was that the soil conservation employees didn't like to be called a regulatory agency. And this is what would turn them into, maybe, becoming that.

RK: Right. They were used to being the good guys going on the farm...

BW: Good guys—plant trees...

RK: ... and then they have to look at enforcement on some of these, on highly erodible lands.

BW: Exactly. Or when they did soil maps and mapping, why they would delineate wetlands, and you couldn't touch those wetlands. And that's what Swamp Buster was, and it still is, still is. That's a very important component of it.

RK: One of the things that continues to be a struggle is to get that kind of agreement going, where there is that relationship between your stewardship and your benefits will be, continues to always be a struggle.

BW: And of course every fall I get the benefits of Swamp Buster, because I go back to Nebraska, hunt ducks. The pothole region of the Dakotas is where my ducks are raised.

RK: Before we leave the '85 Farm Bill, I wanted to have you talk a little bit about one of the issues that I know was important, and because I was peripherally involved in it myself, and that was ... and we were struggling to deal with what the policy should be, in part resulting from the tough times out on the farm, was how did we devise policies on the long term that will actually improve the land and improve the lives for people making a living from it. And so there was at that time, among well-meaning people who were allied on a lot of things, there was a difference of opinion about whether we should seek higher prices to revive parity, or to put more of the emphasis on conservation and reward the conservation practices.

BW: Well, you're right about this being a contested view, especially during the debate of the '85 Farm Bill, because we had quite a group. In fact, they even lobbied the Sierra Club and the Sustainable Working Group, to include in the '85 Farm Bill a parity proposal or something similar to that that would stabilize farm income. And I argued very strongly that this would have the potential of derailing the whole conservation section. In other words, we can't convince urban voters, urban congressmen, urban senators, to vote for a farm program that is going to spend a lot of money not achieving conservation. And this was a conservation section of the farm bill, and we wanted to maintain that. And I say we—the Sierra Club and most of the Sustainable Ag Working Group people, and me in particular. I just think this was going to be a very divisive issue, and I didn't particularly agree that having parity prices is a good conservation tool to achieve soil protection, water protection, farm planning.

RK: So that was one of the rough things that we encountered, and I wanted to get that on the record, because that was an issue.

BW: But like you said, these were well-meaning farmers, a lot of them from Iowa and Minnesota, that really felt that that should be part of it. By the same token I can remember ... gosh, Minnesota farmers, a good friend of mine, I can't remember his name—Dwayne...

RK: Dwight Ault

BW: Ault. Great. He was good. He was a hog producer, but he agreed that we shouldn't include the parity discussion in this conservation section. Yes.

RK: Another tension that was existing, sort of almost opposite, was that some of us felt that we were working on the sustainable agriculture side, but some of the bigger environmental groups did join in at that time, I think after the Sierra Club leading the way, didn't have enough concern for what was going on in sort of rural life out in the country. I remember one criticism was some people, well they don't really care how many farmers we have, as long as they're clean farmers, and so kind of ignoring the community impacts.

BW: They accused me of that also, yes, critics of the Sierra Club. In fact, I remember coming home and went to a Farmers Union meeting, and, boy, they really lit into me. Why I did not include parity or pricing into the conservation section, because then it was passed; it was signed

by Reagan. They were just visibly upset. I said, well, [Chuckles] I was very defensive and said—we had an opportunity to write a conservation section, and that's what we did. And we didn't want to deal with prices. I mean, that's a whole different area of the farm bill that I felt that if they felt so strongly, then they should take that up. Which they did, and they were very successful at it.

RK: Thanks for covering that. And then we move forward a little bit to 1990 Farm Bill, and you were also involved in that farm bill quite a lot, too. And that's the one where we ended up getting the SARE program—the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program. We got a definition, as far as I can recall, of sustainable agriculture that more or less still exists.

BW: That's right.

RK: The Wetland Reserve Program, and one of the very important programs—I don't know if you worked on this one—was the Organic Production Act.

BW: I did.

RK: So that's another one.

BW: That was a significant piece of legislation. It took five years to get that Organic Act implemented.

RK: And that was authorized, and it took 12 years before those standards were actually put in place on what could be called organic or not.

BW: Yeah!

RK: Wasn't it till 2002?

BW: Two thousand and two. Oh, my gosh, I didn't realize it took that long, tell you the truth. I remember working on that section, and I remember some of the contentious meetings we used to have as far as trying to define exactly what organic agriculture was and how we should go about, as far as making sure that it's organic and the standards. Then on my own farm, why, we went organic.

RK: So tell me about that—why did you do that?

BW: I figured maybe there was a market there. The problem, as far as my farm went, was that we were so far away from urban centers that we could not raise the traditional fruit and vegetable crops like they do in the Central Valley here in California, because they're too perishable. But we could raise organic corn, soybeans, wheat, flax, oats that could be stored for long periods of time, and we could put them on the market as we saw fit. The problem with some of that is that markets were hard to come by back then. They were controlled by a lot of, I felt, people that really didn't care how farmers got paid, or how soon they got paid. And farmers were always on the edge of financial problems, and they wanted, if they raise a crop, they would like to have a

solid contract for organic production. And many times those contracts that they sign were just abrogated at any time by these buyers. They just had no staying power for the local farmers. It's too bad, because a lot of them got screwed financially and dropped out of the program, and that's exactly what happened to our farm. He just couldn't market his grains; it was too difficult.

RK: The farmer you hired, or your brother, or whomever that was?

BW: The renter I had. This was when I got this beginning farmer on there, and he was just getting adapted, and he thought that maybe organic agriculture was for him. He did it for a number of years, and then he said—this is too tough.

RK: So I imagine you could even keep up some of those practices, but you just didn't put that name on them and everything, if you knew what you were doing, how to produce them. And your hogs must have been largely organic, weren't they?

BW: That's ... they could be, but you've got to use organic corn, organic oats, organic soybeans, and they also have to make sure how they're raised. They can't be in confinement.

RK: Yeah, it's a tough one.

BW: So it's a tough one, especially for animals. The grain part of it is easy compared to how animal agriculture—the debate on chickens has just been fascinating. They've got to be outside, or at least so they could go outside.

RK: Then you mentioned beginning farmer—that's the thing that was achieved, pretty much, in 1992 Ag Credit Act, where the Beginning Farmer Program started, the federal program to stimulate, help get farmers get started. And you not only had a role in trying to make that act happen, but you actually implemented it on your farm.

BW: Well, I did. Of course, that was the Center for Rural Affairs and Ferd (Hoefner), really pushed that through. That was kind of interesting and fun when that ... because again we took advantage of a needed program that was there, or being proposed, I should say, and accomplished a lot. However, I discovered also in implementing that program that it's very difficult to bring young people into agriculture that have no background in agriculture, or that have no financial resources that they can tap when they're getting started. While I had a lot of interest in young people that wanted to come back to the land and start farming, a lot of them really didn't have a pot to piss in, and it was tough, because they soon saw that it took a little more than that. That's why I was very fortunate in finding local families with young people that wanted to farm, and their parents were right there, locally, to help them get started. All I did is provide a place for them to live and land to rent, and that worked out well.

RK: I'm glad to hear that. That issue raised about the difficulties of young people wanting to get going, especially if they haven't got something like the families you talked about...

BW: That's right.

RK: ... continues to be a big issue. I know groups like Land Stewardship Project are putting a lot of their effort into these training programs, so people know what they're coming into, and to help them get going, too.

BW: That's right. See, there wasn't anything then, and it was very frustrating for them. I could tell them how much problem it is, but they didn't realize that.

RK: Yeah, you had to be there, find out. The last farm bill, I think you really said in your notes you sent to me that up to about the '95 Farm Bill you were quite involved. I know you were testifying and doing a lot of good writing about agriculture and speaking around the country. In '96 the EQIP, Environmental Quality [Incentives] Program, got started, and I think you played a role in that program, too, to get more of those funding into some of the operations to improve the environmental quality of some operations. Did you work on that one or not?

BW: I'm trying to remember back when EQIP.

RK: The 1995 Farm Bill is when that really came up, as far as I know.

BW: OK. I'd have to go back and read—that's ... I can't.

RK: That's all right. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

BW: Yeah, right, that's what it was called, that's right.

RK: That's another one, I brought it up because that's another one of those programs that continues to do a lot of good, but it also has taken a lot of oversight to make sure that the funds that go to that program are really aimed in sort of a sustainable direction, and not just trying to maybe improve a big CAFO or something like that.

BW: Well, one of the problems with the farm bill was that what it did was, because of the advent of all of these new chemicals that corn farmers and soybean farmers, and the equipment they could use to apply these, and minimum tillage just absolutely took off like crazy, or no-till, actually. They could go in and rotate corn and soybeans—and that's still the major rotation on the Great Plains—and spray chemicals on—Roundup, primarily, or a mixture of Roundup and other chemicals—and all they have to do is ... they can actually go in and plant without even disturbing the soil. Now, that's great, conservation-wise, but it may not be so great on the long term of just raising two crops. I never looked upon that as a very sustainable way of farming. But, boy, I would get some really tough arguments by these farmers that believed that this was the ultimate in conservation.

RK: I know that some of the same arguments going around, too, are on the effort to improve cover crops, to get cover crops in the land, too. But at least in some climates you have to terminate those cover crops in order to plant the next year, and often the termination strategy involves more chemicals.

BW: That's right. Cover crops are great, but, again, like you said—how to terminate them.

RK: Well, this has really been fantastic, and I wanted to really get to one more area, and that is looking back over your long career and your activism, and it continues, I think, in a different way, so we could even talk about some of that, what you're still doing, is I wanted to get your view on what were the failures, what didn't work, and what do you think we really need going forward. What would be your priorities if we could go back and do some of it again? If you could give any ideas on that.

BW: Well, one of the things is Swampbuster. Over the years, we in the environmental community have come to look on that, to really save wetlands, you practically have to go out and purchase them. Or give farmers an incentive not to touch them. I think that was the biggest change. Before, we just thought we could legislate no draining of wetlands, and that was all you had to do, and the soil conservation service would implement it, you know. But we found out in the Dakotas that was—and Minnesota—it was just too tough. Just too tough to convince farmers that they get any benefits out of this at all. You've got to get farmers some economic incentive to do these things. I still think, though, that they're awful lax, they're very lax in the conservation compliance section. And I would like to see that strengthened and maybe have a sustainable agriculture approach to some of this mono-culture we've got in the Midwest, as far as corn and soybeans.

RK: I guess there's a lot of criticisms of it, I understand. I don't understand all of it, but the Conservation Stewardship Program that came along later is one of those programs that's supposed to, designed to do that. The better your stewardship goes that you can demonstrate, the more help you can plan to receive from USDA.

BW: That's right, and farmers can enroll in those programs and actually get benefits from that. I actively promoted that back in Nebraska. I thought this is approaching that idea that if you're a good conservationist, a good steward of the land, that you can actually reap some economic benefits because of that. I think that's a good approach.

RK: Thinking about your life, post-farming, I know I saw the one article you sent me about you and your brother putting conservation easements on this piece of prairie.

BW: That's right. This was a piece of prairie that we purchased back in the '80s, and it was really beaten into the ground. It's in a unique area. It's called the Willow Creek Environmental Protection Area, and they're really worried about losing the grasslands there, because they harbor so many wildlife species, like the greater prairie chicken, burrowing owls...

RK: And a host of insects, bees...

BW: A host of insects and a multitude of plants, that once you break that prairie sod up, boy it's really tough to get it back, if not impossible. So I just ... I thought wouldn't it be a wonderful legacy if I could just put that section into the conservation easement and the Northern Prairies Land Trust did that for me, and they went out there, and the game commission monitored and cataloged every plant there and drew up a contract that is wonderful. As far as I'm concerned, it's just exactly what I wanted to do. It put the actual protection right into the deed in the court

house, so it is in perpetuity. I just got a letter from Wind Generating Corporation out of Chicago that said—we are offering \$300,000 per windmill on some of this. He said—on some of it. I just wrote him back and said—there is just no way that we could even consider something like that with this easement. And that was the last thing I ever heard. But it's going to ... there's another huge wind farm being planned, right up there where this land is.

RK: There's a mixed blessing for you, huh? There's a lot of good with windpower...

BW: Well, windmills are great, but I just think the potential, really, is in solar. I really do.

RK: Well, it must be a real pleasure to go back to Nebraska, as you do, to go hunting and see your friends and everything, and be able to walk on the prairie.

BW: Oh, I love it, I love it—yes, I really do.

RK: I can't think of a really better legacy. This is a great note to leave on, but I want to bring up one last thing in your work, and now with veterans, still, right? You're still connected to some work with veterans? I just want to get that in the record.

BW: Well, when I came out here, you know, California has a really interesting history as far as the mission system goes. I was just fascinated when I learned that this place is within a mile of the San Luis Rey Mission, which is called the King of the Missions in this area, it was so huge. The history of the California mission system is just fascinating, because they came in, and it was mainly the ... oh, gosh, I'm trying to think of the ... what were the brothers? Not the Dominicans ... Franciscans! They were the Franciscans. The Jesuits had Baja, California. The Franciscans had Alta, California. And I don't know how they ever divided that up in the Catholic Church, which was interesting. Anyway, San Luis Rey Mission is run by the Franciscans, and I was really fascinated—Camp Pendleton, which is located on the old mission land, came in at the beginning of World War II and just condemned about a third of that for their Marine Corps base. So my wife and I thought we'd just go and study the missions and drive to all the missions in California, which there's—gosh, I don't know, 20 I think, 20 or more. Clear up above, even up above San Francisco. The problem is that the mission system, as far as the Native Americans, there was some conflict; there's no doubt about it.

RK: And I thought this had some connection to some work with some veterans, that's what I was trying to...

BW: I was very interested—how do I get involved in a ... and I knew that there was a group out there that had protections of two major adobes out there, historical adobes. One of them is a national ... well, both of them are national landmarks—Santa Margarita and y Las Flores, and so I went to a meeting once, and I said—look I don't want to lead tours, but I would just like to work out here and help them protect it. And they said—well, that's wonderful, and you can certainly help landscaping, but we have a project that we're having trouble getting off the ground. And that was the veterans memorial garden. So they took me up there and asked if I would take that over. It was growing up in weeds, and I remember Governor Schwarzenegger

coming up there, and they just had to mow it down because it was such a weed patch, so I said—well, I'll try. It took me two or three years to get it cleaned up and planted and now it's thriving.

RK: Well, they definitely picked the right man.

BW: [Chuckles] Well, it was a challenge. And now I have Marines that help me and they volunteer, and Navy people and civilian volunteers, so I have a lot of help, and that helps, that's wonderful. It was my replacement for the farm and ranch in Nebraska. [Laughs] Now I'm gardener. In fact, the Native Americans come up there, and I have this deer grass, and it's the primary grass that they use for making baskets, and they harvest this seed stock that's—oh, boy, it could get 10-foot tall sometimes. And that's what they use, and it's always fun to see them come up and harvest this and clean it off and make sure it can be used. Because the only thing it does with me is if I'm pulling weeds, why the stocks are so strong it gets in your eyes. Poke you in the eye. [Chuckles]

RK: Well, I think that'll do it, Bob. This was great, and thank you for that. Again, especially, thank you for all your years of service. We're all grateful. And it continues to show up in lots of good ways on the landscape.

BW: You should tell, as far as agriculture goes, when we went back to GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade] and studied, visited those farms in Germany and I was on a farm in a polder in the Netherlands.

RK: That's right—we didn't talk about us going us going there...

BW: We didn't do any of that. And then I went on another tour, NAFTA, down into Mexico, where we visited these rural areas of Mexico, and because we were worried that NAFTA was going to be detrimental for the small Mexican farmer, and that's still playing out, because change comes slow in Mexico. Things just don't change that fast. But we did ship a lot of yellow corn down there, and I think probably helped their animal agriculture. Now whether it helped the small peon out on the land is questionable. I think it's still being played out, but just hate to see that agriculture trade in Mexico disappear, because it's so important—we get all our fruits and vegetables here in California in the wintertime from Mexico. It's a great country—I just love to visit Mexico. I think it's just tremendous.

RK: And the thing you did for the GATT talks, going to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, back in the '90s, I guess it was, was the insistence that environmental issues not be dropped, and water quality concerns and things like had to be part of those agreements.

BW: That's right, and to protect the small farmers and Europe. And the French were, they're tough. You don't screw around with French farmers, because they'll throw you in the manure wagon. [Both chuckle]

RK: That was good work, too. So, thank you.

BW: Sure.

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