

**Dana Jackson & Loni Kemp**  
**Narrators**

**Ron Kroese**  
**Interviewer**

**October 21, 2015**

**Dana Jackson—DJ**  
**Loni Kemp—LK**  
**Ron Kroese—RK**

**RK:** October 21, 2015, I have the pleasure of interviewing Dana Jackson and Loni Kemp. To get things going I'd like to have you talk a little bit about your background, all the way back to your childhood, about how you got interested in this subject—what motivated you to get interested in sustainable agriculture? And then we'll move on to the aspects of how you got involved with the Sustainable Ag Working Group and with NSAC (National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition), but I'd like a little deeper background for the sake of this archive. So, Dana, why don't we start with you?

**DJ:** I grew up in Abilene, Kansas, which was a flour milling town in the middle of wheat fields. My parents talked about the weather constantly in the context of wheat—whether it would be good for wheat harvest, or whether the rain would allow the wheat to come up, so that was the agricultural context of my childhood. I really became more thoughtful about agriculture after reading *Sand County Almanac* and becoming a lifetime devotee of Aldo Leopold and all of his work. When, in 1976, we moved—my family, my husband and I, moved to Kansas after three years in California, and having been engaged in environmental issues, we focused on forming a school that would be devoted to alternatives in agriculture, energy, shelter, and waste management. So it was an institute called The Land Institute, in Salina, Kansas. After a few years my former husband wrote a book called *New Roots for Agriculture*, which proposed that we needed to move totally away from annual crops to perennial crops. The Institute then began to focus more on agriculture, and I had to learn a lot more about agriculture. I read lots of books and listened and learned, and by 1983 we had interns in sustainable agriculture. I do believe that the first use of the word “sustainable,” in regard to agriculture, was made at The Land Institute, although that could be disputed. But we focused on, changed our logo, changed our focus, to sustainable agriculture. I worked with students, I worked in public programs, I did the *Land Report*, I edited, I wrote grant proposals. I think writing grant proposals to get money for sustainable agriculture was a major part of my education and my learning how to articulate what sustainable agriculture was. Then, as life takes its turns, I was at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard in 1991-92, studying public administration and public policy. I did a paper on biotechnology and sustainable agriculture. And, by the way, Ash Carter, who is now the secretary of defense, was the professor in that course that I took. It was “Science, Technology, and Public Policy.” I had no idea I would end up in Minnesota, but I did. In 1993, I moved to Minnesota and I began working for Minnesota Food Association, and my job was to be the staff person for a biotechnology working group, which was trying to, in those early days, sort of prevent biotechnology from invading and taking over agriculture. In 1994 I began working for

Land Stewardship Project. I had been on the board of Land Stewardship Project since 1986. All I knew about Minnesota is that I flew to Minnesota and somebody picked me up and took me to Wilder Forest, where I was at a meeting for a couple days, then they took me back to the airport and I went back to Kansas or to Boston, or to Cambridge, where I was living. At Land Stewardship Project I began immediately to be part of the group attended MSAWG (Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group) meetings. I went to one of the first national gatherings, national campaign meetings ... what did we call it?

**LK:** We called it the dialog.

**DJ:** The National Dialog. I went to one in 1994—it wasn't the first one, but I remember that one, and then after that I was engaged with MSAWG. I went to the meetings and worked with them in that capacity for about ten years. So my interest in sustainable agriculture was really ongoing from probably 1970, although I didn't officially work at policy and work such as MSAWG and NSAC, until 2004. Then I began actually doing some work in policy. So I think that's a fair description.

**RK:** Yeah, that's a very good ...

**LK:** My path to a career working in sustainable agriculture policy has many threads. I grew up in the suburbs—Brooklyn Center was potato farms, and all at once in the early '50s, virtually the entire suburb was developed. There was like two styles of houses in the whole community, and we moved there and our house backed onto a wetland, a nature area, and what was to become a big freeway, 694. So I kind of grew up—I've only realized this recently—I had a real antipathy to suburbs. I never wanted to stay there; I never wanted to live there. And someone said something lately about well maybe that was a trigger for your career. And I started thinking about that. You know, I was growing up with a feeling that nature was being conquered. Everything was turning into roads and yards and the wetland was drained and turned into a ball field, and the vast prairie where we played covered wagons turned into a freeway. So that, I think, was a very formative thing for me. My grandparents' garden was a very formative thing for me. I was always just enchanted by their garden, and I've been a lifelong passionate gardener; still am—I'm still expanding my garden all the time. So that's been just a personal theme for me, that, my own relationship to growing things. And I think that's taught me a lot. I grew up in high school and college during a time of great emphasis on social change, and everything was about feminism and civil rights and Earth Day and the Vietnam War, and I totally soaked in social change and knew that that's somehow what I wanted to do with my life. When I went to Macalester College in Saint Paul, it was a great place to be a generalist, which I think I am at heart, as a lot of policy people are. So I made up my own major. Actually it was called urban studies, kind of ironically, but it was kind of integrating social change, environment and all that kind of stuff. After working for awhile in government, I became very disillusioned with achieving social change in government, like in the Pollution Control Agency here in Minnesota and in one of the cities around here. So I went to graduate school at the Humphrey Institute, Hubert Humphrey Institute for Public Affairs in the late '70s, and I studied ... it was kind of a title like yours, Dana, "Environmental and Policy in Technology," working a lot on energy and environment. And there I read Wendell Berry's book, *The Unsettling of America*, and like so many people, it changed my life. I wrote my big paper on industrialization of agriculture.

I don't think sustainable was a phrase that caught it, but I was trying to pull all the threads together, or pull them apart, like we still are today—the land, the food, the farmers, educational institutions, government—all woven together. Then for my internship there was a brand new organization that had just been founded by Mark Dayton, who is now our governor. The governor at that time, Rudy Perpich, had been voted out of office, so Mark had a position in government, as well as a bunch of other people got booted out then, of course. And so they came together and founded the Minnesota Project, so I had my internship there, starting in 1979, and I basically stayed there for 29 years. So I was always working on environment and rural issues. Rural communities became the real tight focus of the Minnesota Project after awhile, and then in 1982, I was able to move with my husband down to southeast Minnesota, out in the countryside in Fillmore County, and open a satellite office down there, and that's where I really dug into work on groundwater, because that's a karst area which has really unique groundwater problems, and I felt like kind of the prophet crying in the wilderness, trying to talk about agriculture might be polluting our groundwater, and oh my goodness! People could not accept that at all at first. But that grew into a focus on water and agriculture, which more or less I have been focused on now for—what is that?—thirty-five years.

(10 minutes 41 seconds)

**RK:** You were talking about being disillusioned with government, but I know along the way you've done some important things in the state government as far as boards and things you've sat on.

**LK:** Yeah, being a staff is one thing in government. I was actually working at the Pollution Control Agency at that time. The Clean Water Act was still quite new, and states were required to develop plans to deal with non-point pollution. Regulations were to take care of the point pollution that comes out of pipes, which it largely has. And every state was supposed to develop plans to deal with that non-point pollution coming from agriculture and construction and some other sources. So it was just very clear that you could hardly say anything. It was just so sensitive. The idea of regulations was just unthinkable. It was just very touchy being a staff person in a state where agriculture is so dominant, trying to raise this fatal flaw in the system.

**RK:** It hasn't changed too much.

**LK:** No, not from the inside. But from the outside, you can get a lot of good things done. I went on to be on the Pollution Control Agency board at a time when we were dealing with some real powerful issues and making some big changes as a citizen board, which, tragically, got dismantled this year as a decision-making body. And then I served on the board of Water and Soil Resources. So I think serving as a citizen board member you are really free to more speak the truth and try to get proposals out there that are going to get some traction.

**RK:** So you're not with the Minnesota Project anymore—what's the deal there?

**LK:** Well, in 2008 the Minnesota Project was actually at about the peak of our effectiveness. We had great staff and funding, and we were having great impact on energy and agriculture policy, but as sometimes happens, we had a leadership change that brought a lot of problems. In the end,

almost the entire staff resigned, including myself. And that was very sad for awhile, but everyone that left, including myself, went on to find new places and ways to do the same kind of work we were doing. In fact, and in many ways, doing it with the same people. So I've been a consultant for the last seven years, and NSAC (National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition), for one, and LSP (Land Stewardship Project), actually many of the organizations we are going to be talking about throughout this interview have been my clients, and I've been able to step in and help them with certain projects, so it's been ... I just have loved being a consultant.

**RK:** Dana, would you want to talk a little bit about what you did after, what you've been doing since you left Land Stewardship Project?

**DJ:** Well, one of the important parts of my work at Land Stewardship Project developed when my daughter and I edited a book called *The Farm as Natural Habitat: Reconnecting Food Systems with Ecosystems*. And in 2000 I helped found the Wild Farm Alliance in California. So as I was working with MSAWG, and as I was developing new programs and food related issues at Land Stewardship Project, I was connecting food and farming and the natural world more and more. And since I have retired from Land Stewardship Project in 2011, I have remained on the board at Wild Farm Alliance. I am now on the advisory board. But I have been working with that organization and some of their issues, and I am now deeply involved in the Saint Croix River Association, and the big issue is, of course, water and runoff from agriculture, which we have known forever. And still—I went to a meeting yesterday, which was the Research Rendezvous at the Saint Croix Research Station—all the papers and all the discussion about phosphorus and nitrogen in the river and so forth. And it's the same problem—agriculture is not regulated. Its wonderful programs—and I know you were so deeply involved in the Conservation Security Program and all that—they have been wonderful and useful and all that, but have never lived up to our hopes and dreams to control water contamination of our rivers and streams and lakes in Minnesota and elsewhere. There are projects going on, but we have not been able to get ahold of that issue, so I think about that quite a bit. But I am also deeply engaged in climate change, and as we go through the discussion I'd like to talk more about climate change issues related to agriculture. I work with Citizens' Climate Lobby and I work with a committee that does programs at my church on climate change, so I'm deeply engaged in those issues.

**RK:** I'd like to have us go now more specifically to the formation of the Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, and then the formation of NSAC. I think what we'll do with that one, if it's OK, we'll start with Loni. I was thinking about it just this morning. I was reviewing the notes from the November 1998 meeting that Denny Caneff, whom I've already interviewed, hosted or served as facilitator for this meeting that led, really, to the formation, formally, of the Sustainable Ag Working Group. And you were there, so I'd like to pick up and have you talk about the development and your role in the development of the SAWGs and then up through your work in NSAC.

**LK:** The first gathering that was called to explore a sustainable agriculture group was in May of '88, and I was down in southeast Minnesota, so, actually, someone else from the Minnesota Project attended to represent Minnesota project. And I don't even remember too much, except that I knew I'd have to be the one to be involved in this from now on. And so I was; I went to this second gathering where we really got down to business. My particular work focus was

groundwater and water quality, as we've been talking about, and from the very beginning that was one of the hot topics, and there were many more. So at that first meeting I volunteered to serve on the coordinating committee and went on over the years to be either on the coordinating committee or chairman of the conservation committee, kind of back and forth, just helping to move things forward. I think one of my talents is being able to kind of gauge a group and help them move to what they agree on a little before they knew they were already there—just kind of make it a little more efficient. I think some of the things that ... I always enjoyed reading the minutes of that initial working meeting in November because we've set the stage right from the start to the style of organization that we would become. It's a working group—we're focused on outcomes, not like just spending our time talking to each other about what we can agree on. From the very beginning it's let's work on whatever we can agree on and not spend too much energy fighting about perfecting the list. That the organization carried that out by saying—OK, as the Midwest Sustainable Ag Working Group we'll speak for those who say we can speak for them, and the others can hang on and keep participating, and whatever, but they were quite careful about not roping organizations into every issue that they weren't prepared to deal with. So those were just like super-wise decisions that have, I think, made a lot of other efforts flounder, just by not doing this simple process that gave everyone a feeling of comfort and confidence that they could move forward and work together, but not step on toes and alienate their board or things like that.

**RK:** And reading from that document this particular paragraph I highlighted: “The discussion then led to what form this working group should take. The idea of a ‘working group’ was preferred to a coalition. A ‘coalition’ to some implied agreeing on everything, and it was felt that it was not necessary or desirable for this group.” So you could be a part of this working group, and you didn't necessarily have to have consensus on everything, but you could work together.

**LK:** Yeah, and that's been a guiding light forever since then. I think another thing that was really apparent from going back to the very beginning was how this collection of organizations had a million good ideas about what needed to be fixed, but I think we developed a style of putting them on the table and welcoming thinking about it, but then fairly quickly sifting out what we could move on and most likely win on sooner. It's probably plagued the organization forever, because it's kind of whack-a-mole, working on sustainable ag issues. You can be really focused on our top priorities but then here comes genetic engineering or killer pesticide, or ... you know. The issues always keep coming up. But I think this welcoming of ... we can talk about anything but we will prioritize what everyone is comfortable moving forward on. That really worked.

**RK:** That meeting was a lot about what became some key pieces of legislation. I'd like to talk a about that. For example, I think the sustainable ag research and education program came out of the '90 farm bill, and that was really an idea that at least in part and maybe to a large extent came out of the SAWGs.

**LK:** Yeah, I think so. I am going to talk about another topic that I was particularly involved in. And this brought back a lot of memories, thinking back so long ago. We had a handle to address groundwater pollution at that time. There was a lot of momentum in Congress, realizing that the Clean Water Act was about surface water, but no one has thought about protecting groundwater. So we had Senator Durenberger here in Minnesota and Senator Fowler from Georgia, and we

knew these bills were arising and they weren't going to deal with agricultural pollution of groundwater. So the way we moved forward is still the way NSAC works. I know I volunteered to write a little paper, a position paper, basically. It was called *Clean Water and Thriving Farms: An Options Paper*, and once it was agreed to, we would have a short list of options that we would pursue in whatever bills were moving forward. That particular paper had a lot of internal dialog, and it was actually not that easy to get full agreement on that paper. I particularly remember Chuck Hassebrook from the Center for Rural Affairs being sort of uncomfortable about we were kind of moving toward a system where there would be well testing, and if contaminants were discovered at levels of concern, of nutrients or pesticide, that then the farmer would do something about it. Does that make sense? It was just so simple. So then we were talking about doing farm plans, because we realized we wanted the farmer to be in charge. It's not just one solution to these things. And we wanted the Soil Conservation Service, as it was called at that time, to be involved and to work on water, not just soil. And we really wanted a big focus on buffers, which, of course, is a huge topic nowadays in Minnesota, as we finally did pass a buffer law here. But these components of a platform of dealing with clean water from agriculture—the environmentalists and the really farm-based people had a lot to teach each other. We worked through it, and we did come up with a consensus paper and continued to work on those issues. The bills didn't pass, and now they've faded from memory, so that's a sad thing.

(24: 27)

**DJ:** I'd like to say something about SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program), even though I wasn't involved in that meeting. At the Land Institute in those days, we were quite encouraged by the low-input sustainable agriculture legislation that had been passed. And I think that was before 1990. That would have been maybe 1986. But we were talking about that. And then there was a publication, *Alternative Agriculture*, which came out of the USDA that was quite encouraging, so we were beginning to see that maybe public policy would respond to some of the concern about soil loss and the importance of the harm that industrial agriculture was doing. So then when SARE was passed, and that would have been the 1990 farm bill, before I was engaged with MSAWG, that was very encouraging, because we could then see opportunities to educate farmers about different ways of doing things that could be much better in the long-term. So SARE was very important. I remember reading a lot about it and following that. And following what Garth Youngberg was doing during the short time that he was on the organic farming program at USDA.

**RK:** Good, I'm glad you raised that. Well then, could you want to take us up a little bit, maybe, toward the 1995 farm bill?

**LK:** Yeah. Well, the 1990 platform that we had in the farm bill that was passed included two revolutionary programs at that time, which were huge successes in policy. The first was the integrated farm management program option. One of the things we've agonized about forever is the free flow of money to the commodity program with built-in restrictions that made farmers keep doing the corn/soy bean thing in order to keep getting that financial support. So the Integrated Farm Management Program—in a way it was revolutionary because it was connecting conservation with the commodity title. It should have provided an option for farmers to say—I still want to get my support like the other farmers, but I'm going to develop a plan that's going to

include resource conserving crop rotations, possibly hay, possibly grazing, and we would actually allow sustainable agriculture to be supported financially just like the commodity program was doing at that time, just with checks in the mailbox. Then at the same time the Water Quality Incentive Program was passed, which was the precursor to what has been the enduring Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), so that was really a great first step that says the government is going to cost-share practices that are going to improve the sustainability of your land. So that was a very early win, and that was very important.

**RK:** What year was that, when, do you recall?

**LK:** I believe it was 1990 farm bill.

**RK:** Yeah, because then we went on, and it was in the '95 bill that the EQIP program that was created by the previous program, was more formalized.

**LK:** Yes, EQIP was formalized and is with us to this day, doing what it does, although the funding is a constant battle. But it's the program that allows farmers to walk in the door at their local office and get funding for specific practices they need, ranging from organic practices through all the soil and water practices that are so beneficial. The Integrated Farm Management Program faded away, wasn't implemented. I actually don't remember exactly how we just lost it, but leading up to the '95 farm bill we had been emboldened, and we were really developing a focus on a green payments program, a comprehensive green payments program. There was going to be one level where you do your best management practices, if you're a kind of a beginner at conservation, and then another level where you would do a whole farm plan, and you would address all of your concerns and have a sustainable farm. There was a lot of momentum at that time—not that we thought the World Trade Organization was a great thing, but it was there and very powerful. And because of the way Europe had their agriculture policies, it could have been the incentive for us to invest big time and convert American farm policy to a green payments program. In fact, it ended up going the other way with decoupling. About 1993 is when we also, we in the Midwest, decided we had better expand; we can't pass national laws just from the Midwest. So the first thing that happened was emissaries went out and helped sustainable ag working groups start in the Northeast, Southeast, West, California. And, magically, it seemed like they, too, found all kinds of divergent interests who were ready to work together and form their own sustainable ag working groups. And then very soon after that we invited folks from those working groups, together with some of the leaders of the Midwest, to begin a process of forming a national. First it was the National Dialog on Sustainable Agriculture. We had two really memorable meetings in Alexandria, where national folks came together. There was real cultural differences. Information wasn't as easily available back then, and so really to understand a good-hearted sugar cane cropper from Louisiana, when all you know is cattle or corn and soy beans, there was just a lot of learning. There was racial diversity, income diversity, city people, country people—it was quite exciting.

(31: 34)

**RK:** Did you write down what years that happened, the Alexandria meetings?

**LK:** I believe it was '93 and '94. You said you went to the '94 one, so ...

**DJ:** Where did you say it was? Was it in Minnesota?

**LK:** No, no—Alexandria.

**RK:** Suburb, DC suburb.

**LK:** ... Virginia.

**DJ:** I think it was February 1994 when I went to the first one.

**LK:** And I think there was one in '93, and then the second one was in '94. So those were how enough consensus was formed to then launch the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture, with members and a coordinating council and even a little bit of staff to start, and then a little bit more later on. So I was on that coordinating council, and eventually co-chaired the National Campaign for Sustainable Ag for three years. And many other Midwest SAWG people did, too, played leadership positions. It was only seven years ago when those are now all merged into the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.

**DJ:** And I remember I was on the coordinating council for MSAWG's SAC, and probably the last five years, and it wasn't smooth. We had problems because we were going after some of the same funders, and MSAWG's SAC, and then the National Campaign, and we were trying to collaborate and it didn't always work, and I think there was confusion in the minds of some of the funders and some of the constituents as to what the differences were and why were there two. So I remember also there were problems because Ferd and the staff for MSAWG, that was in Washington, and the National Campaign's office was where, in New England?

**RK:** New York, I think.

**DJ:** New York somewhere. There was just always sort of a confusion about who Ferd was working for and how to work together. It was very uncomfortable. I remember many, many conference calls trying to sort of separate and figure out and collaborate and it was confusing. So the merger did not happen until after I began working on more food issues and didn't work on policy. But I was so glad to see that there was one organization speaking for sustainable agriculture.

**LK:** There were probably meetings about the structural questions every single year for 28 years. But in 2008 it all came together. Frankly, Ferd and his little policy staff in DC was so clearly our diamond, you know—that's what we had. That's what made all of us rural folks able to have a big impact on policy. No matter how smart you were and what great ideas you had, shooting it in from Minnesota to Washington just didn't have an impact. So finally with the merger we now have a coalition that's national and has that crackerjack office in Washington.

**RK:** As you were talking it reminded me, too, of another group of folks that weren't on my original list that I want to talk to, are a few funders, some people that were key. I think about Vic DeLuca, Jesse Smith Noyes.

**DJ:** Absolutely.

**LK:** Yes.

**RK:** I think about the Joyce Foundation; it was very important to the Midwest part of it, for sure. Having worked some with foundations, part of that difficulty with the foundations, with those funding sources, is they have regional mandates, and so they would be more attracted to some part of the work than to the other, and that's still a struggle. Also, Jean Wallace Douglas—there's some real important people that I think need to be part of this discussion ...

**LK:** The Kellogg Foundation, especially under Miller—Mr. Miller and the Kellogg Foundation gave very broad-based support that really understood how this coalition-building work was so important.

**RK:** One of the things that you didn't touch on, and a little discussion around it would be good, was around the Conservation Reserve Program. That also got going, I believe, in the '90 farm bill.

**LK:** Yeah.

**RK:** You can talk a bit about that, including some of the issues around there, that versus working lands—that was always a part of the tension.

**LK:** Absolutely, yeah. The Conservation Reserve Program was started in the '85 farm bill, and was being implemented aggressively as our organization was getting going. While taking crop land out of production that is causing environmental harm was widely accepted, from the start the program was compromised by enrolling vast acreages sort of with set-aside production reduction in mind, and a lot of land that was really perfectly flat and fine was enrolled, and then there was also the question of over-subscription in rural counties where there was decimating the farm supply and other ag aspects of the rural economy went, like, a third of the land in your county is just set aside. Those farmers drift away, and so there were issues. But right from that very first meeting there was a lot of very solid, specific ideas about how to fix those aspects of the program, never opposing the program.

**RK:** I think from a historical perspective, or even relevance to today and perhaps the future, about that program is the fact that fragile lands have gone in and out of production in this country, and that continues to be the case. I'm thinking about just again now, with the lower commodity prices, and the land that was taken out in the last few years, put back into corn and beans production in the Midwest, is there going to be another cry to expand the Conservation Reserve Program to once again to have another soil bank program like in the '50s and the conservation program that we all know about, the reserve program.

**LK:** There was a time in the '80s where you could look at government policy and basically say we have a commodity title for all-out production. We have a Conservation Reserve Program where you stop farming, and then for sustainable agriculture, we had \$5 million nationally for EQIP, for paying for sustainable practices.

**DJ:** I remember about EQIP being so disappointed because when the grazing interest had begun, with holistic management that Land Stewardship Project was deeply engaged and teaching and moving farmers toward holistic management and having more farms grazing instead of being fed from crops. And we had hopes that EQIP would then be the program that would fund farmers to put up fences and to really organize their systems so that they could graze sustainably. And then, before we knew it, the money was turned into paying for manure lagoons, and it was given to large-scale farmers. And that was so disappointing, because that seemed to me, at the time, this big movement toward grazing was really going to make a difference in agriculture. It was going to integrate livestock and crops again. It was going to improve the soil and stop runoff and all that. And then all of a sudden it was funding manure lagoons and just perpetuating a big problem.

**RK:** Well, one of the things I know that has been important to NSAC over the years, when you look at ... these pieces of legislation aren't static entities, as we well know, and one of the challenges, and one of the good things I think NSAC has been able to do is with the EQIP program bringing more organic thinking into it, keeping an eye on it, dealing with some of those areas of unfairness, and going after it. That's one of the strengths of Ferd Hoefner and the Washington office, in my view, is just keeping on these things. Getting mandatory funding for some of the good things, so it doesn't have to be re-fought every farm bill. Those are critical.

**LK:** There is not a policy around that is going to run like clockwork, the way you wanted it to when you designed it. It's going to be sidelined, it's going to be defunded, it's going to be denigrated or whatever. Or, at the same time you can fight for the funding, you can fight for the rules, you can fight for the interpretation that makes it effective, and, in fact, you have to all the time.

**DJ:** You don't just pass the legislation, you've got to be on it after that for a long, long time.

**RK:** Yeah.

**DJ:** I'm really impressed because I work with the Saint Croix River Association, and they have an EQIP grant, that they are going to be doing a lot work with forestry and farming to improve water quality in the Saint Croix, so I realize that because of people staying on it, we still have some good things coming out of it.

(41:18)

**RK:** Good. Well, I wanted to hit on one more piece of legislation. That's the Conservation Stewardship Program that also wasn't called that from the beginning, but both of you were involved in the policy work when that came about, and it gets at some of the issues of where do

some rewards come in for good stewardship practices within the federal programs. Maybe you could start, Loni, and pick up on that.

**LK:** Senator Tom Harkin from Iowa was really our champion from the very beginning in ways that other policies haven't really had a champion that made it happen. But he also had a lot of luck, which I'll get into in just a moment. So the feeling had started—you know, we were talking a few minutes ago about how green payments was sort of a way of saying something that Harkin totally captured, and he started speaking out all around the country saying—let's stop paying farmers for what they grow, how much they grow; let's pay them for how they grow it, so that we can have environmental benefits for all of society. And that he had a big, huge conservation summit in Iowa in 1999 and brought together all the important groups and agencies within USDA and lots of others. There was just a palpable feeling at that conference that now is the time to prepare this new approach to policy. I believe the farm bill was first supposed to come up in 2000, and although it got delayed.

**RK:** Two thousand two it ultimately happened.

**LK:** Right, it took two years. The thing that I remember, because I think of Tom Harkin with such esteem, and, in fact, when he retired recently, he cited the Conservation Security Program as one of his proudest achievements, along with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Obamacare.

**RK:** Really?

**LK:** Really. He, too, saw that it was so important. But what happened for him was that the Republicans were in control of the Senate and chairing the committee until Jim Jeffords quit. And this is the only time in history this has happened, I guess. He became an independent, which switched the power over to a 50-50 agreement. Neither party had complete control over the Senate, and so they developed this power-sharing agreement, and they split the committees, and Harkin got chairmanship of the Senate Agriculture Committee. That's when all the hearings were held. So for 18 months he was the chairman. Then the Republicans took over for a short time, so Harkin had ... but then he became chairman again, because of the parties' flipping over. And so at the end of 2002 he was the chairman. He said, as he was retiring later, he had to give up a lot in order to keep his top priority, and he did it, and so it passed. Then the next hurdle: the Bush administration took over. As Harkin said, they tried their darndest to kill CSP (Conservation Security Program). Remember that? They just wouldn't write the rules, they wrote terrible rules. They made it available to a couple watersheds in each state, so you couldn't do any work on the issue because you never knew which county would be eligible. It wasn't even counties, it was watersheds would be eligible [Unclear]. But Harkin and NSAC just never took their eyes off the ball. He became chairman again in 2007, and so in the 2008 farm bill is when CSP was locked in, in a way that it had to be implemented as it was intended.

**RK:** And that name changed, just for clarity, from Security to Stewardship, right?

**LK:** Exactly. Now it's the Conservation Stewardship Program, and it was locked in at almost 13 million acres a year to be enrolled, which has gone down a little bit, but as of 2014 we have 10

million acres enrolled in the CSP, and 17 million acres re-enrolled from previous years that had their five-year plan completed, and now they are re-enrolling again, so that's 27 million acres right now in the US that are under this program, and that's a pretty marvelous accomplishment.

**DJ:** Let's go back to the very beginning of this, because the concepts and the ideas were discussed in Land Stewardship Project's Farmer Committee first, and two of the farmers who were instrumental in helping develop these concepts and engage Harkin. I mean, Harkin wasn't engaged in that until the Farmer Committee from Land Stewardship Project reached out, really, and began to engage him. The two farmers who were the most instrumental, almost, are both gone, and they both died from accidents. One was Dave Serfling and the other is Dan Specht, and they were extraordinarily far-sighted, and I think they did it the right way. They sat down and they said—OK, what really might work to get farmers to change their practices and to keep them doing the practices that will save soil, and that's where the idea—we'll pay them for certain practices, and pay them for what they're already doing—that was the important thing. Some of them who we wanted to keep farming and keep succeeding and being models were not having as much success financially, but with this little assistance would just put them over so they could continue. So I really think that that farmer committee—and I know there were other farmers; they were probably Dan French—I can't remember, I know some of the farmers that were ...

**LK:** Dwight Ault.

**DJ:** Dwight Ault was probably, but Dave Serfling was articulate; he became sort of a spokesperson for that, and we lost him way too early. And Dan Specht went on to work for ... he was involved as a representative at the MSAWG meetings. He made many trips to Washington to testify. He was quite impressive; he was a very large man who had this authenticity that just really showed through.

**RK:** And I know that one of the things to note in pride of the ongoing work of Land Stewardship is, I think, Minnesota actually leads in the number of acres of participants in the program today, which is a nice thing to note as well. Before we go forward on that, I'd like Dana or Loni to say just for the record a little bit more what that program does. You touched on it, but just so that we have that, too. What does the Conservation Stewardship Program really allow—what happens with it that benefits farmers?

**LK:** Well, the Conservation Stewardship Program first of all selects farms that applied based on how much good, sustainable farming they are already doing. This is a little esoteric, but it's been a huge part of this program and a model for future policy that gets beyond this commodity title, conservation title split we have. USDA developed a conservation measurement tool that very holistically took in information about how you do farm and the practices you use, and then they compiled a point system for the environmental benefits or hazards that come from that practice. Every farm is so different you just can't say what a person should be doing on their farm, unless you know it very intimately. So this tool applied to any farm, any size, any kind of production, but it really tallied the environmental impacts of their current system first, and so those who were already doing best got in—reward the best. And then, of course, they had to add more, and those were also scored based on their environmental benefits. So it's a program that really holds up our farmers who already invest so much passion into sustainability, as it should, encourages them to

do more, and encourages others to even do more, to come up to speed. So otherwise any other program we were fighting for was always like money for the bad actors to do better. That's OK, but we don't want to lose the sustainable agriculture that we have, so this program really kind of does it both. And now we've overcome all those hurdles about limited enrollment and all that. Now you can basically apply any time and annually they'll write the contracts. You can count on it for the five years, and as long as you're willing to add a little bit more at the end of the five years you can renew it and continue to count on that.

(51:22)

**DJ:** I'd like to say something about an element of support for that bill that came about that time. The concept of ecosystem services began to be discussed among organizations that weren't focusing necessarily on farming. But it began to be clear that there were certain things that could be done that would be useful in agriculture that would enhance habitat, that would enhance opportunities for recreation and make the land more long-term beautiful, so there was a lot of support for CSP from organizations that focused on wildlife and wilderness, and that's where the Land Stewardship Project's George Boody, who is the executive director, got involved in the book that my daughter and I put together. The book had to do with the farm as natural habitat—how the farm can provide the services of providing food for people, and at the same time be connected to the natural world and preserve habitat and increase biodiversity. So George wrote the policy chapter in that book, and it was connected to the idea of ecosystem services, that farms could provide ecosystem services. So the support of a lot of wilderness wildlife groups was there, birding groups, because CSP could provide farmers rewards for ecosystem services. So that was a really important conceptual coming together, I think, on that particular legislation.

**RK:** Definitely, definitely.

**LK:** I'd like to just tell a little bit how we organized broad-based support in Minnesota for CSP, too, beyond the sustainable agriculture groups. The Minnesota Project decided that we wanted to form a series of meetings with all of the commodity groups and Department of Ag and other state entities—basically the people that you don't sit down with. You're kind of watching each other all the time, but at that time it was highly unusual to sit down with them, so we strategized about it. We just didn't think they'd come if the Minnesota Project invited them—that's how separate and hostile it was back then. But coincidentally, Representative Minge had lost his seat in the US House of Representatives, and so we called on him. He had been on the Agriculture Committee, had really great relationships, and we asked if he would take a contract with us to help us lead those meetings. He was very enthusiastic, very passionate about the idea of the CSP, and, of course, he had been lobbied by all of the big agriculture groups in Minnesota and knew them well. So he chaired those meetings, which we held at the Department of Agriculture in Minnesota. That was another strategic thing. We, at the Minnesota Project, we decided to have local foods for snacks—that was sort of just a little thing on the side which had never been done before—talk about the farmers who supplied the snacks. Very gingerly and tentatively and slowly we built up relationships that allowed the Minnesota Project to really train them on what's in the bill and what's in the first set of rules and what are some improvements that you might want to submit testimony for. Or maybe you want to sign on to support the bill. I have a feeling there's too little of that done, even today. It's very hard work, it gets disappointing when

you're also having a really big disagreement with one of these groups. But in the end I think we just have to keep trying and finding the places where we can find support within the big farm groups and the commodity groups. Frankly, in my opinion, a lot of these national groups, particularly, don't represent their farmer members, so sometimes doing it at the state level you can find a lot of support for conservation in the Corn Growers or the Farm Bureau, and that's kind of how we did it. Meanwhile, out in Washington, maybe their spokespersons are getting a little training on a different attitude towards some of these policies.

**DJ:** Loni mentioned local food, and I want to bring up that became an important influence that MSAWG had in legislation that brought about some of the wonderful things we are seeing now, and disappointing things, too. But when I began working with MSAWG, I was put on the committee that I think was called marketing. I'm not quite sure what the committee was called, but initially the woman who led it was from Nebraska, and we were beginning to talk about how farmers could get more money for their products if they sold them directly. It had a lot to do with livestock, the price of meat and so forth, that they were not getting adequately compensated, especially as the large confinement facilities grew and markets began to be captured, it was much more difficult. So there was a slow discussion about direct marketing and how farmers could do that, and it moved from livestock to all kinds of other crops. So at the MSAWG meetings this committee worked on a notebook, which I sort of recall, which had to do with all kinds of tips and ideas for direct marketing. It didn't have to do with policy. But it was important, because some of the basic ideas about how we could move to more local foods, more money for farmers to get paid directly for what was produced was evolving in those committee meetings. And that, of course, took a long time, but at Land Stewardship Project we were also making more connections. We were connected with CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) farmers and the whole growth of that movement came out of our relationships with Dan Guenther and other pioneers and the CSA directors. So that was going on, and then as that movement grew, it eventually resulted in farmers' market promotion program, and these were policy issues that MSAWG was engaged in. There were a lot of school-related programs, I think, that were passed after '05 and maybe the '08 farm bill. But nevertheless, that nucleus, I think, was really important at MSAWG. It took us awhile to articulate what kind of legislation, what kind of policy making could come out of that, because we were talking more directly with farmers. It was an important role, I think. And then, of course, we've got farm to school grants now, all kinds of public policy to encourage more local production.

**RK:** Yeah, it's very important to think about the need to have this good strong connection between food groups, particularly hunger groups, and the policies that affect farming, because that's been another one of those tensions over the years that hasn't been positive much of the time, and I think that it's beginning to come together in an important way.

(59:59)

**DJ:** And I think that's another role that the National Campaign played, in that some of those initial meetings were with groups who were at the other end of the food issue. They really needed more food and they were working with low-income people and trying to distribute food. The social action groups were engaged with the farmers, because MSAWG really had that Midwest farmer focus, and it kept up. And it's still there, of course. It's important with all of

these conservation bills. But the food side of it wouldn't have happened without that more relationship building between consumers and farmers and farm policy.

**RK:** Well, we've covered a good deal of ground on the policy front, the federal policy front, and the many contributions that NSAC and its predecessors have made, but I'd like to wrap this section up by asking if there's any other policies that you would particularly like to talk about that were important and you had a role in and that NSAC's been important in. Loni, do you want to start.

**LK:** This was an area that consumed a lot of effort from me, but a lot of other people in NSAC, too, but particularly Martha Noble on the staff. We succeeded very partially, and that is the issue of confined animal feeding operations—feed lots. There was a sense 20 years ago that the Clean Water Act should be amended periodically, just like the farm bill has this trigger that it's going to expire if you don't deal with every five years or so. The Clean Water Act doesn't have that expiration in there, and it hasn't been amended in decades because, in the end, to open it up for any point opens it up to make it worse instead of better, and so it's been untouched in decades. But the Clean Water Network was a national coalition of environmental groups that wanted to work on improvements to the Clean Water Act. So, coming out of NSAC, there were a number of us that had not only the ongoing issues that polluted run-off, but this huge emerging issue, huge, of huge feedlots popping up all over the countryside with their open-air lagoons and massive amounts of manure in locations that couldn't possibly apply it to the land sustainably. But the first battle was to convince the environmental groups in the Clean Water Network that you really have to take on CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations) and agriculture. We almost had the door slammed in our faces, I felt like, at the early meetings. But the groups working on water quality just kept pushing and pushing and saying—what is the number one source of water pollution in this country? It comes from agriculture—how can you take agriculture off your reform agenda? And gradually groups like National Resources Defense Council and others came into alliance with us, and the Audubon Society came on board, and eventually it was a huge priority, and that coalition worked diligently for decades through the Clinton administration. The sad part of the story is, of course, that feed lots even now are expanding ever larger and are not adequately regulated. Now Minnesota did ban open air lagoons—they have to be under buildings. but, by and large, really addressing the fundamental flaws of bringing all the grain to feedlots and then having all that manure in huge feeding operations is not a good idea. So I just wanted to recognize the work of Martha Noble and a bunch of other people in, first of all, getting the environmental community to really bring agriculture into their agenda, and that was successful. But there has been no administration that has succeeded in overcoming the ag lobby to deal with even counting or measuring CAFOs. I mean, it's just really sad. It breaks my heart to think all these years we haven't succeeded.

**RK:** It's also clear from the attempts with the Waters of the U.S., rules have come out of EPA, proposed rules, and the way they have just been trounced on with a lot of misleading information coming from Farm Bureau and other groups about what its real implications are going to be. Just any attempt to bring any sort of not even necessarily regulation, but accountability and monitoring to it has been just a terrific struggle.

**LK:** Yeah, it's really devastating.

**RK:** Anything more from you on that front, Dana, on the policy front, on NSAC?

**DJ:** Well, I don't know how much NSAC was involved. I can't remember the details the way Loni does, but I do remember having great hopes for what we called Freedom to Farm, because we thought that by changing the way the commodity programs were paid for that farmers would, if they didn't have to tie the money they got to a particular crop, then they would be enabled to transition to crop rotations, but they didn't, and that was so disappointing. We woke up and realized that the farmers were still just planting corn. They didn't make the transition to this opportunity, and they got ... the big farmers were getting more money. It was one of those lessons that with your high hopes and dreams and your ambitions for what good people will do when they get the opportunity—it just didn't work.

**LK:** Just one more detail on that is the whole idea was to copy Europe and support farmers financially but don't tell them what they have to farm, so then they'd be free to have pasture and hay and raise vegetables if they want, and all that. But the minute that prices got low there was still hidden in that farm bill—apparently no one knew it—there was still hidden in that farm bill that the commodity price supports would come into play when prices got low. And so, all of a sudden, base acres are important again and those deficiency checks were coming in, and farmers never did feel free to stop relying on the commodities, because the risk protection is all in commodity production.

**RK:** Well, I think that's a good segue to another area I wanted to cover, and that is going forward on what you think the key policy areas should be. Just, for example, when you talk about risk protection, a lot of folks, including Land Stewardship Project, are looking very much at crop insurance, and the organic groups are looking at the fact that organics doesn't get the kind of risk protection that the commodities do or have a tough time getting the kind of insurance coverage, so I'd like to hear from each of you about what you think the priorities need to be say for the next farm bill, or even looking out farther in the future.

**LK:** I'd like to just look at this whole bigger question of what kind of food do consumers want to buy. I was not convinced early-on that organic labeling and availability of organic food would be the avenue to change the whole food system, coming from the Corn Belt in the Midwest. However, and it's not just about the organic label, but I do believe now that the demand for healthy food, local food, organic food—people shopping for the food system they want by the food they buy—I now believe that that is the most hopeful way to change and win all the sustainable agriculture policies that we've wanted, because you don't have to go through Congress, you don't have to fight for the funding. We still have a lot of education to do, but I see a huge sea change. With the obesity epidemic, people really are learning about food and fresh, healthy, and organic food. Young mothers are just turning out in droves to feed their families better and stepping away from the junk food. It's the fastest growing sector in the food industry. It's not going to necessarily be in the little retail operations that were envisioned. Costco is now the bigger marketer of organic food and Wal-Mart is close behind. I'm OK with that, actually. I think the most important thing is to have healthy food and to have it grown sustainably on the land. I see that as a huge way that our coalition didn't address as much as policy to help the market be a driver. Now you have to have policy that matches that, that supports it, that makes it

possible for the farmers to make changes and to survive and have good risk management, to control the capitalist system to a point where it's fair. But at the same time I really do think that the whole country is waking up to the importance of healthy food, and that that's going to change things much quicker than it has been in recent years.

(1:09:44)

**DJ:** I agree with you, and what is surprising is that even though in the things that I wrote and the things that we talked about, that was what we kept pointing to as what should happen and what could happen, but I never quite believed it would. But still it seemed the right thing, and in *The Farm as Natural Habitat* we talked about that also, that the way that consumers can participate in farm policy is to make the choices that will support the values they believe in, not only for themselves. They needed to be stewards of the table if they were going to have stewardship of the land, and that was a real important concept. But I think there's another thing involved now that is going to be driving the direction of agriculture. We see it when Cargill and General Mills announces that they are going to go along with President Obama's plan for addressing climate change, for reducing their carbon input and affecting their suppliers and their supply chain. It's very good public relations, and I hope they really mean it. But I believe that the necessity for resilience in the face of climate change and for food security has got to be addressed in the next 20-30-50 years. The most aspect of that that I see is in what farmers are already doing when they focus on soil health. A lot of that started in North Dakota with farmers who were beginning to think that their land was not as productive and that they had more drought than other areas and what could they do to hold the water. How could they affordably improve the quality of their soil—some very interesting grassroots work, which has spread all over the country. But there is a focus on soil health, and that has to do with, again, integrating livestock with crops on land. It isn't just grazing, and it isn't just no-till. It's this concept of following cover crops with cattle, which gives you more money from the cover crops, and then you also can have regular commodity crops in the rotation. So there's a lot of interest in that, but the focus connected to climate change is that if you build that soil health, and its absorption capacity to hold water, to absorb water in heavy rains. If you have more perennials on the land—and there's a lot more talk now about root systems holding water and filtering nitrogen and so forth. I think that that aspect needs to be really be pushed and promoted, and the focus on soil health. But what will drive interest of a lot of these international companies who depend upon agriculture all around the world is thinking about how they can keep resilience. Of course, some of them can afford to lose everything in one part of the world and succeed in another part of the world, but if you're thinking about the cost of transporting food and how we're going to feed populations, we have to think about the most important resource, which we have always known is the land and the soil. So I would like to see NSAC keep emphasizing the conservation programs, but really figure out ways to integrate it with this important concept of soil health. And then the advantages that that focus brings in terms of biodiversity, in terms of monarch restoration and bird habitat and so forth is just amazing. There is some serendipity in risk, because if people feel that that risk to come from extreme spring rainfalls or long droughts is so great that their farming income is in ... and the U.S. government cannot pay, possibly pay for all of the catastrophes that are going to happen, and they can't pay for the crop insurance for the number of climate events, of weather events that are going to affect food production. So we've got to face up to that problem.

**RK:** Very good. And I think that both the food issue and the climate issue, very quickly, in my mind and yours too, translate, or need to translate, OK, in what kind of policies can enhance those things to move forward. When I was talking with Kate Clancy, one of her big issues is try to get the whole of how food is grown into the nutrition standards, so that becomes part of the picture of what a healthy diet and healthy food is. It's not just when it arrives on the table, but what happens before that. There again, it's a policy opportunity, so they are definitely there. You were going to say some more?

**LK:** Another area that I'm working on now for future needs for good policy to promote sustainable agriculture is in the area of climate change and the relationship to energy production in agriculture. So I've done a lot of work with Union of Concerned Scientists and National Resources Defense Council that are really looking at the big and the small picture of how to go forward, I think in a way that's very complementary to NSAC's principles. So the first thing—I think that to address climate change there's a consensus already building around solar and wind to replace our fossil fuel electricity, but liquid fuels is the other big problem. I've always felt that bio-energy, fuels that come from the land, is our only real hope in the long run for the liquid bio-fuels that we are going to need. So I've been working a lot on how that opportunity can be the means to bring a crop to agriculture that can be perennial, that can be sustainable, that can increase soil carbon while they are producing cellulose for future fuel use. Predictably, but sort of unfortunately, corn stover is the obvious first cellulose choice out there, and so I've got a report coming out with Natural Resources Defense Council real soon on sustainable stover harvest. It can be sustainable on really specific conditions. And interestingly enough, the first three companies that have built the first three cellulosic ethanol plants have each taken a slightly different path, but they really have pretty well locked in either really reduced harvests or never on sloped land, or only with no-till. They are really building in the cautions that you need to. However, I can remember when ethanol just exploded. All of a sudden there's 20-30-40 more plants, and that could happen with cellulosic, and we don't have any policies in place to make sure that stover is harvested sustainably, because if it's done in the wrong places and at too high a level, you're actually degrading the soil carbon, degrading soil health.

(1:17:47)

**DJ:** The other thing is that you cannot collect stover economically with centralized large-scale plants because of the transportation costs of gathering it all. So the planning needs to think more locally of your community-based for energy production so that it's affordable to bring it together.

**LK:** It's actually affordable in these initial plants. They have some different approaches, but it's not very often the farmer bringing it all the way to the plant. There's other third-party new little community businesses that are doing it. It is a concern, though.

**RK:** From what I've understood, too, this is where more research and federal policy could come in, and that's with cover crops that can be used in the corn regimen, so that the ground is covered in the wintertime, and you also get nourishment from the cover crops if you're going to take the stover off.

**LK:** The DuPont facility that is nearing completion in Iowa, they actually signed a memorandum of agreement with Natural Resources Conservation Service, and each farm is supposed to have a conservation plan. For a lot of Iowa, what the state NRCS guy in charge of this program says—it's going to take cover crops and no-till. These are not predominant practices in Iowa at all right now, so because we don't have policy in place, the oversight and transparency of these systems remains to be seen, but these initial companies are sitting in place. So stover is sort of like the stepping stone because it's there, and they are often somehow in conjunction with the corn ethanol plant. Of course, the real vision is perennials, and so that's where my real hopes lie that in my lifetime we'll see vast buffer strips, hillsides, the less productive parts of farms can be planted to perennials. And it can be interchangeable with livestock and harvest for bio-fuels, but I think that is a real beautiful vision for the future is to think about taking all of our sore spots on the landscape and having some switch grass and mixed prairie species providing habitat and water collection and continually building up carbon in the soil.

**DJ:** That's also something I've been thinking about a lot, because my daughter Laura is the director of the Tallgrass Prairie Center at the University of Northern Iowa, and they've been working in conjunction with Iowa State on their prairie strips project. So the Tallgrass Prairie Center has a prairie on farms project, where they are actually planting twenty or more species in corn fields. And, of course, the benefits of this, to me, are also for increased biodiversity and wildlife as well as water conservation. They also have a prairie energy project that is separate, but there are opportunities when you can put the land into native prairie, where the roots go so deep, and there are so many advantages over non-native plants. But that's a very complex process, and the word "system" is a word we used a lot for awhile. I think with all of these things, even if it's stover, the programs have to be programs that involve systems, not just cutting the stover and turning it into energy. Connect with NRCS. Have it connected to a plan for taking care of the land. We think in terms of commodity crops—you're a corn/soy bean farmer—it's so simple. The systems have to be more complex and integrated with a lot of other things, including wildlife and livestock. So it's systems thinking. We talked a lot about that in the early days of MISA (Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture), a lot about turning our agriculture systems so there's more systems thinking. And somehow that's just very difficult—outside the sustainable ag world it's very difficult.

**RK:** Yes. Well, that's very interesting. You've kind of provided a segue by using the MISA word. I'd like to end our discussion with, since both of you have been so important to the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture over the years, I'd like to have you talk about that. And maybe to start this off, since Loni was part of the sustainers' group, talk a bit about what that was and how things got going in the late '80s, '87—talk about that, and then we can pick up on any contributions Dana also made to it, serving on the boards, etc., a little bit later.

**LK:** Well, I recall that Ken Taylor was really the springboard for this whole endeavor, to try to make a place for sustainable agriculture in the University of Minnesota, a land grant college. At the beginning it was like you couldn't say the word; it was just not understood. There was just such a single vision of progress in agriculture at the university. So Ken brought together like-minded folks in Minnesota from the Minnesota Project. Actually, Marcia Keller, our executive director, was the participant for the five years of dialog that went on to try to even find the words to tell each other what we were talking about. So I was spared the agony of that long, slow

process, but I certainly got to participate in the fruits of it, which was by the end there was some good understanding of how sustainable agriculture was critical to the mission of the university and some understanding about what are the research and education avenues that needed to be followed. So I was recruited to be on the board and got to participate then on a foundation of bylaws and a mission and some clear relationships. I think for three years I was the chairman, and I think I served another few years on the board as well. So we invented, with the financial support that came forward from the university, we helped the staff invent these different avenues of outreach and research and grants and endowed chair for experts to come in. And then it was after I was off the board that the great blow came when the dean decided to dismiss our executive director, Don Wyse. And it turns out we were pretty much helpless to stop that. There had been funding fights all along, and MISA has persevered and done a lot of work, but it's never been secure in the way that, I think, the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture in Iowa is, because they have a legislatively defined funding source from pesticide taxes. They probably get other money as well, but they have that foundation. But now, of course, you can look at what's going on in the university and you can see a lot of fruits, with the classes that are offered and the majors and minors that are offered, and a huge influx of students who are very interested in food and sustainable systems. So it's nice to look back and see how from a time of complete lack of understanding to even what the sustainers were talking about to today, where it's not dominant, but it's very present, and students and researchers that want to work in this area, I think, really appreciate the support of MISA.

(1:26:43)

**RK:** And I felt it was good to bring it up with this discussion with you, because it sort of relates to the formation of the working groups and that sort of thing—some of the same people, but also some of the same sort of thinking is how we came together. All the people and the different groups that were in the so-called sustainers' coalition weren't all on the same page about everything. But we took that kind of working group approach to get things going, and then linked in under the leadership of the late Ken Taylor, no doubt about it ...this was happening at the same time, this same kind of thinking and energy was involved in it.

**DJ:** And it was happening in places other than Minnesota.

**RK:** Good point.

**DJ:** And that's the interesting place, wherever there was a budding sustainable ag group, and they were developing. I mean, Nebraska Center for Rural Affairs, of course, but in Kansas there was the Kansas Rural Center, and I was on the founding board of the Kansas Rural Center, and we were engaged in some of the discussions with Kansas State University, the land grant university, to try to help them understand that there was a need for a different way of looking at agriculture. And I remember big battles with the dean of the college, because he put out a report, they put out a report telling about all of the research that Kansas State was doing in sustainable agriculture, and the committee went through every piece of the research and investigated it and then wrote a report showing how foolish the whole report was, and then the dean came out with a statement about sustainment in agriculture, which we ridiculed. So by the time I came to Minnesota, I was mentally already engaged in this effort to help the land grant university see that

its responsibility was to address the needs of farmers, not companies. So my first job was working for Ken Taylor at Minnesota Food Association, and he thoroughly indoctrinated me into the importance of MISA and what was going on, and by the spring of 1993 I was elected to the board of MISA. So when I came on the board Loni was there, and I was on the board during those early years when we were formulating everything. I was also on the board when Don (Wyse) was removed as the executive director, and I remember all of the debate and the struggle, and we felt we were going through what the sustainers had gone through years before. Again, it was that justifying the need for a different way of looking at agriculture and providing resources for people to learn. And MISA survived, and I think Helene Murray probably needs to be given a lot of credit because over the years I know that it's taken a lot of diplomacy, probably a lot of going backwards in order to go forward, and only certain personalities—not mine—could have survived that. I worked on a number of committees, and I remember setting up the graduate program in sustainable agriculture first, how important that was to begin to get some classes in the curriculum. And then the endowed chair, which we were smart-alec-ly calling “the rotating bench.” And I think it was a great idea, and it was different, and it wouldn't have come out of a regular academic setting, to come up with an endowed chair. It came out of a group of people who were from non-profit organizations, religious organizations, people who could think a little more broadly about what this could mean to the university. So the idea was no professorial type in a particular position for 20 years as an endowed chair, but interesting people engaged in different aspects of sustainable agriculture-related fields, serving for short periods of time, talking to students, interacting with the university. I think it was a great concept, and I am just really pleased to see that it survived all of the efforts to steal the money away from that endowment fund and that it's going. Because it has, if you look at the long list of people who have served in the position that you're in, Ron, really interesting people bringing quite different perspectives to the university. I think that's a very good legacy.

**RK:** Thank you. And you touched on the whole area of the university's role in research, and that reminds me of that's something that Chuck Hassebrook's been really talking about, that for years and years, about the research policy tends to set the social agenda, ultimately, in agriculture. I mean, just the milieu is formed by all of this research and the direction it goes, and the impact that sustainable agriculture and groups like MISA are starting to have, continuing to have, and increasingly having, I think, on campuses and in research from the universities is really one of the big accomplishments over the last 30 years.

**DJ:** And in the field of local foods, developing food systems, bringing the discussion around even to the importance of healthy food for people of all income levels—some of that's come through the university, the garden, and through Bud Markhart, who was the horticulture professor here, who, there's an endowed program to help students of low income engage in activities here. Bud is no longer with us, either. He's one of those early heroes that brought a breadth to the university, and he was connected to MISA, and the student garden was connected to MISA. They participated in these events that we had for a number of years that were fairs, food fairs. We had it at the state fairgrounds every spring, and MISA was always involved in that. So MISA has provided a breadth of programs and ideas, I think, that have been wonderful for the whole state.

**RK:** Well, is there anything that either of you have to say, or should we end it there? Whatever, anything else, any closing comments?

**LK:** I would just like to share the words of Ken Taylor that were so inspirational to me. It was not too long before he passed away, but I was agonizing about whether to get involved with this MISA board, you know. And so he said—well, there's four rules to get things done. He said—show up, listen, speak the truth, and then don't be attached to the outcome. I don't know if he made those up or if they were standard.

**DJ:** Oh, they were in the conference room at Minnesota Food Association, painted on the walls up around, and that was where the board met, and the board of directors of the MFA at the time had to abide by those principles in board meetings.

**LK:** Well, it certainly has served probably all of us well, to persevere through, what, nearly 40 years of work in these fields, and it really helps you do your best, but not freak out when you don't win, because sometimes you don't win for the first 40 years; you win later.

**DJ:** Well, it also helps you have better outcomes because sometimes you have to give. Through discussion you learn that maybe the idea that you were so attached to is not the best idea. And that was always something that he emphasized, to keep willing to kind of turn around and look at it from a different point of view.

**RK:** Very good—perfect way to end this discussion. Thank you very much, to both of you.

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