

**Tom Harkin
Ferd Hoefner
Narrators**

**Ron Kroese
Interviewer**

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**Tom Harkin—TH
Ferd Hoefner—FH
Ron Kroese—RK**

RK: This is Ron Kroese. It's October 11, 2017. Ferd Hoefner, senior policy director for the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, and I are in the Methodist Building on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC this morning, where we have the privilege of interviewing former Senator Tom Harkin, Democrat from Iowa, who served in Congress from 1974 to 2015, five terms in the House then five terms in the Senate. Senator, thank you very much for joining us today. Really, really appreciate it.

FH: Sure

RK: There are many, many accomplishments from your distinguished career that we could discuss, not the least of which is the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990, as well as many other laws and programs that resulted from your leadership in the Health and Human Services Committees over the years, programs that really continue to improve the quality of life for all Americans. This morning, however, Ferd and I would like to primarily focus on your service throughout your career on the House and Senate Agriculture Committees, and the Appropriation Committees relevant to them, particularly your leadership on policies and programs to advance sustainable and organic farming and healthy rural communities. So I always like to start these interviews by asking folks I talk with for this archive about how they got interested in agriculture and rural issues, going all the way back to your childhood, and, in your case, in the small town of Cumming, Iowa.

TH: Well, that's a ... talk about a walk down Memory Lane! Well, our family was very poor. My mother was an immigrant. My dad only had a sixth-grade education, but we had one acre of land. We didn't have a farm; we just had one acre. But on that acre we had a small barn, a chicken coop. We always had a milk cow, and we'd just take the milk cow out different places, put 'em on the stake. During the winter we just let the cow have the run of the barn, and we had a milk stall, those things that go around their neck, holds while you milk the cow. And then chickens, so we always had chickens and a rooster, and we had fresh eggs. We had a chicken coop. We had two pear trees, two apple trees, six peach trees, a cherry tree, an apricot tree, and an enormous garden, all on this little plot of land. And, of course, in that garden, we grew everything. I remember we had a strawberry patch. We grew all these fresh vegetables, and my mother would

can all this stuff. So all winter we had peaches and pears and apples, but we just didn't can the apples—we had a couple, three barrels in the basement that we kept the apples in. And then we would butcher; my dad would butcher something every year. In the fall there'd be something to butcher, a calf or a hog or something like that. People shake their heads at this these days, but my mother actually canned the meat.

RK: My Mom did, too.

TH: Oh, is that right? [Chuckles] People say how do you do that? You put can ... no, it's in jars, big old Mason jars and stuff like that. I always tell people also—you know, we never wasted anything; we ate the hearts, the tongues, the livers, the kidneys, the tripe. We never called it tripe; that was sort of a Southern phrase or something. But my mother, being from the old country, knew all this stuff, so we always ate everything. And so I always say I grew up very poor, but I was never hungry. We always had fresh food to eat—fresh eggs, fresh vegetables. Even in the wintertime we ate, because we had it all canned, and we had it in the cellar. So as life goes on, and I grow older and through college, military, and all that, I remembered how good those things tasted. And all the sudden I'm eating stuff that has no flavor. So I just ... this doesn't taste like the meats I used to have or the carrots I used to have, or the ... what else did she ... just all the vegetables we used to have—they just didn't taste the same. And peaches were hard and ... well, about that time, I was out of the military, and I started running for Congress, and I ran into a guy had long hair and a beard. And he wrote a book—*Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times*—Jim Hightower. You remember Jim?

FH: Yeah.

TH: Anyway, so we became friends, and I read his book, and I thought, you know, that guy's onto something, how we're moving away from that. So thus began, sort of, my interest, legislatively, after I got into Congress in '74. I forget when that book came out—about that time.

FH: Right around then, yeah.

TH: Somewhere right around there. And then, so it ... I got to thinking more about big farms and little farms and how much we were able to do on a small plot of land to feed a family of six—actually, more; six kids, two adults—eight people! We, basically, lived on an acre of land. Well, we bought other stuff, too, I'm sure, but we got most of our food there, and it was always fresh. I got on the Ag Committee in 1975 in the House, when I got elected. I got on with a guy from Minnesota by the name of Rick Nolan, who in 2017 is back in the House again.

FH: And back on the Agriculture Committee. [All chuckle]

TH: Back on the Ag Committee. So Rick Nolan and I—there were others, too, on the Ag committee, but we sort of formed a partnership. He was from Minnesota. And I remember the first thing we tried to do on a farm bill of '76, '77?

FH: Seventy-seven, yeah

TH: Seventy-seven Farm Bill, OK. So I'd been in one term, reelected, so we're in '77. And Nolan and I had this crazy idea that—well, not a crazy idea; we knew, I mean I knew from reading and just history that the federal government, since World War II, had been actively involved in encouraging bigger farms. Through all of their policies, everything pushed farmers towards getting bigger. So we had this idea that support prices for corn—beans weren't covered yet—corn, program crops, but we focused mostly on corn—that the support prices ought to be such that the smaller farmer got more and the bigger farmer got less. So it was like ... I can't remember exactly, but it was like, you know, for the first thousand bushels, you've got parity prices, or maybe even more than parity. And for the next thousand you got less and less and less. So that the bigger you are the less you got, until you finally got nothing. You just got it on the first production level, so it helped smaller farmers more than it helped bigger farmers. And I remember Bob Poage, who was chair of the Ag Committee, said—well, he wasn't; he got deposed, but he was still on the Ag Committee. I remember him saying once that that was wrong. He said—every bushel of corn ought to be supported by the same price, every bushel. Well, that meant the bigger you are, the more you got, and the more you got, the more you were able to bid up the price of land compared to your neighbors, so it was actively encouraging this growth. We didn't get anywhere with our bill, of course, but that was sort of my first foray into trying to focus on family farms and small farms and that kind of thing.

FH: It was just ... two weeks ago was the 40th anniversary of the signing of the 1977 Farm Bill, so 40 years ago. So the Food Stamp Act, still the model, the best food stamp bill that we ever passed, but Title I of the 1977 Farm Bill is the Family Farm Policy Act and Payment Limitations. You have to get to Title II before you get to commodity programs. Title I is payment limitations.

TH: Payment limitations.

FH: Yup.

TH: Wow, that was in '77.

FH: Hard to imagine today, Title I being payment limitations. [Chuckles]

TH: I remember there were some big fights over that, too, payment limitations. But some of these farmers were making a lot of money on those payments. As I said, every bushel of corn, so the more you produced, the more you got. Do you remember what the payment limit at that time?

FH: Fifty, 50 thousand.

TH: Fifty thousand—my gosh. But there was ways around it.

FH: Oh, yeah.

TH: Oh, my gosh, then, as we went ahead, farmers got ways of subdividing or having other family members and all kinds of ingenious ways of getting around that.

FH: At that time it seemed like it was really solid, but then the abuses started mounting and mounting and mounting.

RK: Well, very good—we're off to a wonderful start. As one can tell in watching this interview is that Senator Harkin and Ferd are long-time acquaintances, and, the reason is, is Ferd spent a lot of time, I think, working with you, Senator, and with your staff on moving these many pieces forward.

TH: Many, many years, yeah.

RK: So I want to have Ferd, more or less, take over, now, this discussion and kind of take you through some of the key pieces of legislation and that sort of thing, going forward.

FH: OK, great. Maybe, starting with when you came over to the Senate, and it was a farm bill year in 1985, which was the first farm bill that really treated conservation as a fully legitimate farm bill issue. Of course, the Conservation Reserve Program and Conservation Compliance, so that farmers had to do basic soil conservation in order to qualify for payments. So that sort of put conservation, you know, sort of more front and center. In the farm bill, in a modest way, as we look back on it, but that sort of opened the door to many of your accomplishments that followed in the years later.

TH: Just as my accomplishments all started with the Coalition, anyway. [Chuckles] I just happened to be in the right place to be helpful.

FH: And none of these things would have happened if you hadn't led the charge. But I'm tempted to fast forward, right away, to 2002 and 2008 when you were chairing, but I want to start more early-on in this conservation story.

TH: Clue me in, because I've forgotten.

FH: So we had this initial 1985, but then the farm crisis is happening at the same time, so the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition really forms because of the farm crisis, sort of saying—how are mid-scale family farms going to possibly stay in business? If they don't want to get super-large and become a mega-farm, they want to stay at family size, support their rural community, what can they do? How do you get your production costs under control by doing lower input systems; how do you get value added for your product, get more money on the other end. That sort of was the error; that we came into existence was trying to deal with that. And, of course, we immediately looked to conservation as one of the ways that the government could support family farm income, but do it in a way that also supported a public good, in terms of environmental protection and natural resource protection. And so that '85 bill was so important because it put conservation front and center in the farm bill. Obviously Conservation Reserve was in part because Congress was interested in getting supply under control and trying to get prices up in the farm crisis context. So we had a 35-million-acre conservation reserve that took a lot of land out of production. But that began to shift then in the 1990 farm bill. We added the Wetlands Reserve Program. Well, we did a lot of things in 1990, but in the conservation arena,

you led the charge on the Water Quality Incentives Program, which is amazingly just as relevant in 2017 as it was in 1990. [Chuckles]

TH: More so, in Iowa. Well, I'm sure, other states, too.

FH: What are your recollections of that? I mean, that obviously then became the precursor to what is today the EQIP Program, or the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. But that really started with your water quality [Unclear]

TH: That was in the '90 Farm Bill?

FH: Nineteen-ninety.

TH: Boy, I would have thought it was later than that. I would have thought that would have been in a later farm bill ... that early, huh?

FH: Yeah.

TH: Well, even at that time we were having water problems. Well, it kind of dovetails with EQIP. When did EQIP come in?

FH: Ninety-six.

TH: Ninety-six. Because ... OK, now this is making sense. Even at that time a lot of the practices of animal agriculture, at least in my state—well, all over—was changing. The small farms that I grew up with, and the farmer would have a few cattle and some hogs—they did chores in the morning, in the afternoon, and in the evening—began to go into bigger and bigger operations. Well, it's one thing for a number of farmers to have a few hogs spread around and maybe some cows or calves. Usually you'd take the manure and dry it and spread it out with a manure spreader. But these bigger ones got bigger, and they just let the manure pile up, and then it was going into streams and things like that. So we were getting a lot of complaints about that, and so we did this water quality—I thought it was called the Water Quality Incentives Program.

FH: That's right, yeah.

TH: Not improvement—Incentives Program. And then, I guess—now it comes back—by the time we get to '95 we figured there had to be something else to help stem the problem of the ... what do they call them? Large animal confinement...

FH: CAFOS, yeah.

TH: CAFOs, yeah—Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations. Well, I'm getting ahead of myself here, but here's what I remember about that. So we put this together, but then, again, it became a kind of a program where the bigger you are, the more you got. Just the opposite of what we wanted to do—that was very frustrating, because we were trying to focus on smaller. So a lot of these big CAFOs invaded this program. God, they were getting a lot of money, and it

enabled them to even get bigger and having even more animal feeding operations. And they were doing a lousy job of putting in pits, ponds and stuff to hold manure, and they were always leaking and breaking down and all that kind of stuff. But they just kept getting more money through the EQIP Program. I was never much of a fan of the EQIP Program, and I kept going after it. But the big farm bureaus and the people like that, and the cattlemen and the pork producers, that was their big deal. That's how I remember it.

FH: No, that's right, and the interesting sidelight on that was in the '96 Farm Bill, the really largest CAFOs were prohibited from being part of EQIP, and the reason for that was Bob Dole was running for president in the Iowa caucuses, and he then offered the amendment to ... CAFOs could still qualify, but the really big CAFOs couldn't qualify. But then in the next farm bill after that, that got reversed and everybody could qualify.

TH: That's what I remember [Unclear]

FH: But thanks to Bob Dole running in the Iowa caucuses, [Chuckles] we were able to limit that a little bit in the 1996 bill.

TH: For a few years they were limited, huh?

FH: Yeah.

TH: I just remember the big ones coming in and getting this, and just frustrating. But that happened later on, huh?

FH: Yeah, yeah. So, continuing the conservation story, so then your Water Quality Incentive Program sort of morphed into the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, and the '96 bill we also had something called the Conservation Farm Option, which never really got taken off the ground. It was in the farm bill, it was, I considered...

TH: What year was this?

TH: Ninety-six. So it was sort of the precursor to the Conservation Security Act, but for a variety of reasons it never actually happened, but it was in the '96 bill. So then a couple of years later you've got a whole lot of people in Iowa talking about Conservation Security Act, so pick up the story there.

TH: All I remember ... well, OK. I remember a trip I took to Europe with Andy Fish.

FH: Aha!

TH: I remember, people always said—well, you know, they support their farmers over there even more than here, but they have small farms ... I wanted to figure out what were they doing? So, I remember Andy Fish and I, we went to Great Britain, we went to France, the Netherlands, someplace else. Anyway, we looked at hog operations, we looked at land operations, and it occurred to me on this trip that they were paying their farmers not on how much they produced,

but on how they produce it. Were they good stewards of the soil. I thought—this is ingenious! Even ... the Dutch, they have all these hams and stuff, so they're very big on pork production, but they don't have any place to put it. I remember even at that time we visited a hog operation someplace in Amsterdam—I don't know where. They had the same hog operation, where the hogs would defecate and urinate down through the slatted floors. They would pick up all the stuff and slurry it, put it into a tank, and then there was a long line, and they would take stuff out of that. I remember one was sulfur, and they would market the sulfur. Then they would take something else out and market that. Take something else, clean it up. By the end thing—I will never forget this—it had a little spigot and you could drink a glass of water.

RK: Wow!

TH: I said, well now, if they can do that and make money, why can't we? But it was mostly the land stuff, and that's when I came back and began preaching about—it's time to stop paying farmers under the World War II program crops, for what you grow and how much you grow—so there's program crops, and then you get paid on how much—and start paying farmers for how they produce it. Are they good stewards of the soil? Do they improve water quality, habitat, tith—which is an interesting word—soil tith—health, healthy soil. And so that's how this kind of thing came about. And then you guys got involved, and started putting it all together for us.

FH: Yeah, I remember how it must have been 25 separate conference calls with a whole bunch of academics and farmers and advocates, mostly in Iowa, some in the surrounding states, going back and forth, and we would do a draft, and I would do a summary, and they would critique it, and then we would rewrite it.

TH: And Andy was involved.

FH: Andy was involved and Mark was involved...

TH: And Mark Halvorson, our staff director.

FH: And so that became the Conservation Security Act.

TH: That would have been in ... what farm bill was that?

FH: Eventually, it was 2002—well, it should have been 2001, but it didn't become law until 2002.

TH: That's right.

FH: Right. And so...

TH: I was able to stick it in there. [Chuckles]

FH: Yeah, yeah. And, of course, so that was somewhat magical farm bill, for two reasons: one was we had “surpluses” as far as the eye could see, so there was a big chunk of extra, additional

money laid on the farm bill table. But, politically, the important thing was Jim Jeffords woke up one day and decided to switch parties.

TH: Oh, that's right. That's how we got chairman.

FH: So, in 2001 it was still Chairman Lugar, but then in the midstream, it became Chairman Harkin.

TH: That's right, that's right. And I remember working on that, and, you know, it's interesting ... you reminded me it was Larry ...

FH: Combest.

TH: Larry Combest from Texas on that, so the House was Republican. We had a one-vote margin in the Senate. But by that time, I and you, others, had been working on this Conservation Security Program. The idea of paying farmers ... oh, this is the other thing. See, in the past we always paid conservation on land you took out of production—that was basically it, CRP. But we knew more and more land was going to be going into production, so how do you incentivize farmers to have conservation practices on “working lands,” that was the whole deal. And we had some experiments. I remember, but two things I remember: we had done a thing in southwest Iowa where we ... I got some money, probably through appropriations, because I had those two hats—I had appropriations and authorizing. So I got some money and we set up a rotational grazing operation on CRP land, on CRP. In other words, the idea you couldn't graze on CRP because the cows, it would mess it all up and tear up the soil and crap would run down, so they forbid that. So we had this experiment in southwest Iowa, I remember visiting it a few times, where you do rotational. Now, you did have to put up some fencing, and it required a little bit of extra labor, because you had to go out and move the fences around and stuff. But out of that, we learned that you could actually do rotational grazing on CRP land and still protect the soil and the cover crop and stuff like that. So that was the idea, but how do you get farmers to do conservation practices on working lands? The minimum tillage, for example, of stopping moldboard plowing in the fall. All the time I was a kid growing up, farmers would go out there, and they just wasted so much money, but they thought it looked pretty—moldboard turn that dirt over in the fall.

RK: Clean was the word...

TH: Oh, yeah, it looked so nice and that kind of stuff, and it was nonsense. I remember in my area farmers who started doing ... actually, they would not plow in the fall, they would just, maybe, in the spring disk a little bit, and then they would drill, plant the corn. And I remember other farmers would say—oh, it's ugly; it doesn't look good. Well, [Chuckles] according to them it didn't look good, but it sure saved soil, and when the wind would blow, it didn't blow away a lot of that soil into the ditches. And so that all started about that time. But that was the idea, and then to get to pay farmers for—to get back to what I learned, here—not for how much they grow or what they grow, but how they grow, how they do it, and did they do it in a conserving way. And then the same way with animals, too. But I don't think we did a very good job on animals. We still have a problem.

FH: Indeed.

TH: The big operations.

RK: I was wondering, Ferd, to get to somewhere along the line the word stewardship was added to that program.

FH: Yeah, yeah, yeah, so, right, right. It started as Conservation Security Program in 2002, and then in 2008 it got renamed Conservation Stewardship Program, but it still spelled CSP. [All laugh]

TH: So we got this Conservation Security Program in the 2002 Farm Bill; I was chairman. I remember Larry Combest—the Republicans and the people in the House, they were all focused on the big program crops and the support prices, this and that. I remember we did a little feint on them, saying, well, no, we can't do this or do this, or do this. We actually had conferences in those days, where we'd get together. But I had this Conservation Security Program, just a piddling little thing, and they finally, in exchange, probably, for some of my support for some of their programs I held my nose on, we were able to get this in. But not ... the ink wasn't dry on the bill and we had the election. Of course, we lost the Senate, so I'm back again as ranking member—and the administration under George Bush—he didn't know anything about it, but I forget who the secretary of agriculture was, but, anyway, they would not implement that program. You may remember more about that, Ferd, than I do, but, God, it was awful! I mean, we had just a little bit, we just kept at it, and not letting them do away with that program. But now I can't remember...

FH: They started it so that it was limited to a small number of watersheds in each state, so instead of being a comprehensive nationwide program, it was very ...

TH: That's what it was.

FH: ... very spotty participation.

TH: OK, see, it jogged my memory. Because I remember as that first year went by, and they didn't want to put the money in that we had authorized, and I would hear from people in Iowa—how come they get it and we don't?

FH: Exactly.

TH: That was the deal, oh, yeah.

FH: That was the whole targeted watershed approach, and they didn't stay the same from year to year, so one year this area had it, and the next year a different area. It was unworkable, but eventually we got that fixed and changed the name in the process, and going back to the whole working lands focus, so conservation, whether you go all the way back to the Soil Bank or the Conservation Reserve Program, even the Wetlands Reserve Easement thing, these were all

taking land out of production. But starting with Water Quality Incentive Program and then into EQIP, and then into CSP, now we're at the place where a majority of the conservation title is working land, so it's been a major transformation, and CSP itself is an 80-million-acre program now.

TH: Is it 80 now?

FH: Eighty million acres, the biggest conservation program by acres that we've ever had in the history of the country. So it's...

TH: I didn't know it was that big. I thought it was around 50 or 60 million. It's up to 80 million now!

FH: It's up to 80 million, and hopefully in the 2018 Farm Bill we'll keep it going. So it's remarkable, and it's had, I think, a real impact. People are doing cover cropping, crop rotation, conservation tillage, advanced nutrient management—all sorts of important things, on the one hand. On the other hand, it's never really quite made it to being a green payments program, as that's understood in Europe, where this is really what you do to have a farm program. We still have our traditional commodity program, and we have CSP, which is great—we're much better off for having it, but any thoughts on why is that, why can't we ever get to the place where we can pay for how you produce, instead of how much you produce?

TH: Well, if we could just get a president that would focus on it and get a secretary of agriculture, and really push it, we might start to get over that hump. But it's still the problem—Ferd, you know as well as I do—it's the big farms and then, I guess, pooh-poohing little farms, organics, that type of thing. We've made some inroads. The Beginning Farmer Program and, if I'm not mistaken, I think there's something in the CSP, maybe, or someplace, that gives more to beginning farmers. Am I mistaken on that, or is there something like that?

FH: There's a set-aside for beginning farmers so that they compete within their same pool, so they don't have to compete against older, fully...

TH: OK. I knew there was something there. But I don't know the answer to your question. I think it's just, you know ... I shouldn't keep pointing my finger at the Farm Bureau, but I will. I mean, the Farm Bureau has been reluctant to be supportive of this kind of move for green payments. They still adhere to the old program crop-type payments, and then you've got some people on the Ag Committee, like Pat Roberts, Senator Roberts, and stuff, who just, you know—he keeps calling it production agriculture. If you're big you're production agriculture, but if you're small, you're not. Well, small farmers produce things [Chuckles]—healthy foods, they take care of the soil. But there's still this old concept around ... I don't know; I don't have a better answer for you. Maybe you have a better answer—I don't know.

FH: It just seems to me that ... well, back when you were on the House Agriculture Committee, there were like robust debates about what is the purpose of commodity programs. Today, I don't find that to be the case. We have ten different variants of commodity programs, each one unique to a crop or a region, and nobody really debates why we do it—we just do it. Until people want

to serve on the Agriculture Committee for reasons other than protecting their home state commodity...

TH: And that's about it, isn't it? People who are on the Ag Committee, it was my thought later on it was just these later farm bills when I wasn't here that everybody had their own little deal, protect their own little interest. That was about it.

FH: So much so that in the most recent farm bill they had to put in a huge amount of money for Farm Service Agency to contract out with land grant universities to develop decision support systems so that farmers could figure out which of the various variants would return the biggest paycheck to them.

TH: [Chuckles] Of course.

FH: And it's just like—really, that's what we've evolved to? So it's kind of interesting. But the good news there is that we have a very healthy conservation title, and Conservation Stewardship Program is going gangbusters.

TH: Well, if we can keep increase ... that's encouraging for me to hear there's 80 million, and the next farm bill is 2018.

FH: Twenty-eighteen, yeah.

TH: I don't hold much [Unclear] I don't know—we'll see. I don't know, with this White House now and Congress, I hope we can hold our own.

FH: Yeah, I think that will be the objective, is to hold our own.

RK: Well, Ferd, I was thinking now maybe, unless you want to add to this; this is fascinating. You know, one of the things that I've talked to a couple of people about before I've done this interview that are supporters for this is they consider you to be the champion for organic farming.

TH: Well, we started it. Again, that's where we were...

RK: We definitely want to go into that topic—the SARE Program and those sorts of things.

FH: Yeah, yeah, so let's go back and trace that a little bit. So the 1990 Farm Bill, Pat Leahy was chairing, you're on the committee, and the National Organic Program gets approved, the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, the SARE Program, goes into that farm bill. The first time USDA has really set aside money to do sustainable ag research. So that's really the starting point, but then later on, when you're chairman in 2002, we get organic certification cost share, and...

TH: That's right. Well, that was the big deal.

FH: ... and the Organic Research Program, so those were really big deals.

TH: Both of them, both of those. Now correct me if I'm wrong, Ferd, but I remember a lot of my friends Iowa wanted to be organic farmers, and I learned then from these meetings that in order to be certified organic you had to go ... what sticks in my mind—three years. Was it three?

FH: Right.

TH: Three years without using any pesticides or herbicides on that land. We always called it the Valley of Death, because you stopped using these, your production went down, but you didn't get the higher prices that organics got, so you had to get through this whole thing. Now, some of my friends who were farming in Iowa were able to do it, because their land was paid for, handed down from their parents, they could do it. But if you were just starting out, you couldn't afford to do that. So that's how we started this cost share, or...

FH: Certification cost share.

TH: ... Certification cost share. And I think that helped quite a bit. I think it helped people transition to be organic farmers, and we found more and more people going into organics, yeah.

FH: And just to show you how far that's come, when you authorized it and got it funded, it was run through state departments of agriculture, primarily—that's who actually delivered it to farmers. In the final year of the Obama administration, they've actually moved the program to Farm Service Agency, so it's just like any other program. You go to your county office and you sign up for organic certification cost share, so it's really ... I feel like that's symbolic of now it's part and parcel of our farm policy.

TH: If we can keep the Farm Service Agency alive. Didn't they make some ... haven't they made some runs on...

FH: Closing offices.

TH: Closing offices and all that kind of stuff?

FH: We'll see what this administration does. They haven't said anything about that yet, but we'll see what happens.

TH: See, there are some things I've forgotten, or I didn't...

FH: But organic agriculture is also relevant to another thing you raised just a moment ago, which is new and beginning farmers, because whether it's organic or local food or value added, they, you know, the way to break into agriculture unless you inherit it all is to find some niche, and organic can be an important piece of that.

TH: Huge, huge, oh yeah. I know numbers of farmers in Iowa that started out with a small plot of land. They were organic or they ... later, farmers markets, too. So they did organics, they did

farmers markets, and it was usually the case where the husband and wife—both, probably—worked someplace. But they had enough time left to farm a small plot and grow some organic crops, and they got big money for it, for that little operation, and they were then able to accumulate some capital and expand their operation, and I know a few of them that did organics, but then they did non-organics on some other land. But they always kept the organic thing going. So there's some split personalities on this, in my state, anyway, I know, on this.

FH: Yeah, and I think that's actually increasingly common, I think, because some of the more conventional farmers out there are saying—well, you know, commodity prices aren't very good right now; maybe we should try this. I think you're seeing more people doing that.

TH: This is probably the wrong time to do this, but just jogging my memory, I remember having a hearing once—what farm bill was it? Well, I don't know. Maybe it wasn't even a ... I had a hearing once. I was in the Senate, I'm chair of the committee, and we had a hearing, and it had to do with how much land did you need in order to be ... to make a living. And so I [Chuckles] I sandbagged it. This is where I had Maria Rosmann—Ron and Maria—but I had Maria there, and she was my last witness, and then we had the Farm Bureau and the Corn Growers and the Soybean Association—we had all those people lined up, talking about small farms can't make it, and you got a lot of land, and blah, blah, blah. And organics won't ... anyway, we went down the list. So I had Maria in there. They have a farm in western Iowa; I think it's about a section—it's oh, maybe it's 500 acres, 600 acres, something like that. They had switched to all organics, not only in their crops, but in their livestock, also. So I asked her about how much land they had. I think it's around ... I'm close.

FH: They're about a section, yeah.

TH: About a section, about 500 acres, 600 acres, 640 acres being a section, and some of it was pasture land. And so I asked her about her operation and organics and what they were doing, and on that fairly small plot of land—which would have been big in my childhood—they raised a family, sent their kids to college. One of their sons was back in the farming operation with them, and they were doing quite well. I'll never forget that hearing—maybe you were there for it. It was just wonderful. Maria played the great straight person in saying—no, you don't need 2,000 acres of land; you don't need all that stuff. If you do it right and you focus on it, you can make a good living. And now they had, I think, one of their kids back in the operation with them, which I think is still true today.

FH: Yeah, that's terrific. So another topic we should touch on is, in the 2008 Farm Bill, your energy title.

TH: First time. The first time we put energy in there, in the ... and you know what? I got help from Dick Lugar on that. I remember Lugar was very helpful on that, in the 2008 Farm Bill. We focused on a couple of things. One was a ... was that the REAP program?

FH: REAP, yup—Rural Energy for America Program.

TH: Rural Energy Assistance Program. One of the aspects was geared towards—now you have to help me—like community-based or community-based, town-based, area-based energy production. The other one was focused on individual farmers, where they could get some money in loans, maybe?

FH: Loans and/or grants.

TH: Loans and grants to put in their own energy systems. So that was the two thing, and one of the first I remember of that was, that I saw in my state, was in, I think, what was the name of the town? Green, not Green ... near Scranton. I'm sorry, I've lost the name of the town. Anyway, the community had applied and got some money, and they, I think they put four or five wind generators up, something like that, for the community. It was like a Godsend! So they got community-based. And then we started finding individual farmers who were doing mostly wind in Iowa. That was mostly wind energy. And cutting their costs down, even though we didn't have reverse, net metering, we didn't have net metering. But even with the grants and the loans, the farmer could put up ... oh, it wasn't just generating electricity, it was also saving energy. So they could do insulation or double-paned windows. I remember one operation, he insulated his ... not a barn, like a thing where he kept his livestock in the wintertime and stuff like that. So he had done all this stuff, and he'd put in double-paned windows facing the south. Saved him a ton of money! And heating the darned place during the winter! So I remember, that's right, the energy. And how is that doing today?

FH: It's still alive. It needs to be renewed every farm bill; that's an ongoing topic that many of them were innovative programs, like value-added producer grants and parts of the energy title and the local food and farmers market program. They are funded through the farm bill, but every farm bill you have to come back and find new money for them. They're not permanent like commodity programs or food stamps or crop insurance subsidies are.

TH: Not mandatory.

FH: They're mandatory, but they're not permanent mandatory, so every farm bill you have to find a way to pay for them.

TH: They just extend it for the life of the farm bill.

FH: Yeah, so we're back in that position now. So that's another one I did want to mention is the Farmers...

TH: Is the REAP Program still working now?

FH: REAP is working, and that, thankfully, now is the ... it's the only energy title program that has permanent mandatory funding. So it's in a good spot.

TH: Oh, that's nice.

FH: Yeah, that's really good. But the Farmers Market Promotion Program is another one that you championed back in the 2002 bill. That's still alive; it's now called the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program.

TH: ... and Local Food Promotion—when did that name...?

FH: That got added in the 2014 Farm Bill through Debbie Stabenow's work, but it's still basically the same program that...

TH: Actually, that's one of the best things we ever did.

FH: It really is.

TH: I'm saying you, too, and the Sustainable Ag Coalition—was that Farmers Market Promotion Program.

FH: Promotion, yup.

TH: My gosh—I mean, there's farmers markets all over the place now. All these small towns ... my wife, just this morning before I came in for this interview, my wife went to a farmers market in a local library in Alexandria, Virginia. I mean, just things like that. And people come there and buy a lot of stuff. So...

FH: And, again, it's a really important opportunity for newer and beginning farmers to break in, to have a market that's a high-value market. And then if they can get started, they can go on and have a wholesale part of their business or sell to institutions. But the farmers market is often that first step, or community supported agriculture, which that program also supports.

TH: I got to get rid of a gripe here that I have.

FH: Yeah.

TH: We love going to farmers markets. We'll buy whatever we can during the season of farmers markets in Iowa, a huge one in Des Moines. But, you know what I found? More and more of these big farmer markets, people are coming in, and they go to some local wholesaler, and they buy it and they bring it there. And you can tell who they are. I just don't buy from them; I'm sorry, I'll buy stuff from people that actually are growing it, and you get to know them. It's just a gripe I have.

FH: It's gotten even more extreme now, because now you can go into big supermarket chains and above the produce section it says—Farmers Market! [Chuckles]

TH: Oh, no!

FH: Or community supported agriculture, which is another subscription-based agriculture, which is a great way for farmers to link up with consumers, but now you have things that are calling

themselves consumer supported agriculture or community supported agriculture that are really just wholesale businesses, but they changed the name to protect their sales.

TH: Yeah. But I still—this is just a little aside—I remember a long time ago when this whole thing started, we had a little farmers market in West Des Moines, and I went to it once, and there was one farmer there that sold organic chickens, the kind of chickens I ate when I was a kid that peck in the ground. And so the first time I bought one there—he sold them whole and you just cut them up—it was easy—or bake them; they’re just delicious. And then he also sold eggs. The difference in those eggs compared to what you’d buy at Safeway or whatever was just amazing. The color, the flavor. But I remember going there, and you know, we were one of ... we’d buy a chicken, we’d buy some eggs, never a big deal. As the years rolled by, the lines got longer and longer, and if you weren’t there at 7 a.m. in the morning, [Chuckles]you missed. Because people started getting on to it. And that’s just over a few years’ period of time. So people got onto it and it became ... I will never forget just that one small farmer out west of Des Moines doing that.

RK: You know, it made me think, too, Senator about all your work on health. And linking like even the ability of people on food stamps to be able to get food at farmers markets.

TH: That’s right. Oh, that’s the other thing—oh, gosh, I forget when we did that. But you go to farmers markets now, and you can ... and they’ll have the sign—We Accept...

RK: WIC?

TH: It’s called something else now; not food stamps but ... SNAP.

FH: SNAP.

TH: SNAP—We Accept SNAP Vouchers Here.

FH: And then there’s also the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program. So both of those are really just an accepted part of the program now.

TH: That’s amazing.

RK: Yeah, and you know, really linking the fact that we can get this good food now, and how it can support the health of people all over the country is something you were able to bring together. I thought that was an achievement in itself.

TH: In fact, I was just listening to a radio report, driving in before this interview this morning. I was listening to an NPR story about obesity in the world, and it was some report about how globally obesity has increased ten-fold or something like that in the last few years. They were talking about this, and whoever was the person giving the interview, she said that ... the question was asked that, well, what can be done about this? She said—oh, you got to start with kids early. They have to start eating good food early and healthy food early, so that they establish lifetime patterns. That gets into my fruit and vegetable snack program in schools. [Chuckles]

FH: Yes, right.

TH: Well, that's just another one, anyway.

RK: That's good, though. So what was that about?

TH: Well, again, this was the 2002 Farm Bill. The 2002 Farm Bill—I don't know where the heck I ... I'm sorry, I lost how I came up with this idea. Maybe you guys...

FH: No, it wasn't us this time. [Chuckles]

TH: How ... I'm sorry, I don't know. Someone came up with it—I'll have to go back and ask my staff. Well, anyway, the idea about it was to get fresh fruits and vegetables to kids in school. So I'm chair of the committee, and I wanted to push it, and I got it in as a pilot program. We had four states: Iowa, Michigan, Ohio and Indiana, a total of 100 schools, 25 in a state, some rural, some urban, high schools, grade schools. And I think, I forget how much money I had, but it wasn't very much. I don't know—three or four million dollars, something like that, for this pilot program. And they let me have it, because I let them have whatever they wanted. I'm saying "they," the big farm groups. So I got it in, and then again the administration kept trying to stop it, but I'm on the appropriations committee, see, so I was able to use that to push the funding. And I remember going out and visiting schools. This was a snack program, and it had to be fresh fruits and vegetables. Well, that's the other thing—in all these years, with all these supports that we had for program crops, we never supported fruits and vegetables—they were never part of the farm bill. So now I had a little thing in there where they were part of the farm bill. I guess they never really wanted to be, or I don't know—anyway, they never were a part of it. So now they were, and they saw how this could be a demand pull for fresh fruits and vegetables. And so these four states ... and I went out and visited some schools. I remember I visited a school in Michigan and I visited one in Ohio and I visited a couple in Iowa to see how they were doing, and later on, even though I wasn't chair, when the chair would have hearings—I guess that would be Lugar again—was it Lugar?

FH: After 2002, yeah.

TH: I think at the time it was Lugar.

FH: Yeah.

TH: And he was nice; he was very good about this. So he let me bring some people in and talk about this nascent program that was starting. And I remember interesting things about in the beginning how some principals and school boards when they testified were opposed to it. Kids would make a mess and they'd throw stuff all over and all that kind of ... and we stipulated that it should not be in the lunchroom. It should be either in a kiosk in the hall or in the classroom, and it could be a snack program in the morning or in the afternoon—we were just trying different experiments. I remember, so it had been existence for a year and a half, in 2003-2004. Specter—Arlen Specter was my co-chair on the Appropriations Committee, on the Health Committee, but he's not on the ag approps, so he comes to me and says he'd heard about this. Why can't I have it

in Pennsylvania? Well put the money into Pennsylvania! So he did, he put money in, and we got the Pennsylvania. Thad Cochran comes up to me, said, say he heard about this thing, and he's getting some people from Mississippi. Can we get Mississippi? I said, sure, Thad. He's on approps—put some money into it. And so then we went to Pennsylvania and Mississippi, and maybe there are a couple of other states, I don't know. But we just got people on the Appropriations Committee to put more money in. And then, let's see, what happened? Well, a lot of stories about testimony and stuff. Some schools were putting these on the buses in rural areas, so the kids would come to school and they would eat the stuff on the bus. I remember we had this testimony from this one school district—I don't know where it was from—and talked about how when they first did this, kids were throwing apple cores or banana peels or whatever on the floor. Bus drivers were getting upset, til someone said ... well, they went down to their local Safeway or whatever and got little plastic bags and put them on the back seats of all the seats—problem solved! The kids, they just didn't have a place to put them, so they'd throw them on the floor. They put the bags there, so they'd put them in the bag—problem solved. And then we found ... I remember when I visited ... we had a high school in Des Moines, North High School. I went there when ... and we get our first strawberry crop in Iowa before the school was out, and they would bring in the fresh strawberries, and they would cut them, clean them, put them out. By 10 a.m. in the morning there wasn't a strawberry left in the school. I always tell these stories because I was fascinated by a lot of this. I went to a school once—it wasn't in Iowa; I think it was in Michigan, and they had kiwi fruit. And see, again, we wanted to focus only on fruits that were grown in the United States, but kiwis were grown in California, see. And I remember being in this 3rd grade class, and that morning they were having kiwi fruit. And this teacher had done a wonderful thing. When they would have a fruit, they would draw a map—where's it from, how is it grown—teaching these ... it was really wonderful. I learned two things that morning—I'll never forget—I'd eaten kiwi fruit before; it's always a mess to peel them. But I knew they were high in vitamin C and all that, but I never bought very much, but every time I did I thought this is too much work to eat kiwi fruit. I learned two things that morning. I learned that a kiwi fruit takes male and female. You have to have two together. Well, I didn't know that. Little girl sitting there, and they've got this kiwi fruit and they're talking about where it comes from and stuff like that, and the teacher said, well, OK, go ahead and eat it. She had a plastic spoon, and she took her spoon and stabbed it in the middle, opened it up, and scooped it out and ate it.

FH: [Chuckles] Why didn't I...

TH: Why didn't I think of that? [All chuckle] All those years. Third-grade kid teaches me how to eat a kiwi fruit. That always stuck in my mind. But anyway, as the years went by ... so now I'm back in chairmanship again in 2007 and '08 for that next farm bill, so we learned some things. So what did we do? We changed the program—no more high schools. Well, again, we had a limited amount of money, and we found high schools were not ... that's another story, and that has to do with the school lunch program and Tom Vilsack, but that's another story. I'm talking about the snack program. So we carved out high schools, and we put in a factor for if your elementary school had a high proportion of free- and reduced-price lunches, where they had a lot of poor kids, you kind of got to the head of the line to get the money. We so got a lot of these into the food desert areas in cities and things. And we bumped up the money—I don't know ... gosh, I forget how much it is now, but it's in every state. Elementary schools only. What else was I thinking? Oh, I know what it is—so, fresh fruits and vegetables. It became so

successful that Dole—not Bob Dole, but Dole Company—started packaging just for this program. The first one I saw was a pineapple pushup, because pineapples were Hawaii, right? That's fantastic. So there's these little plastic things like, you know, kids get ice, those ice things in them—you're going to get those now, buy them in a grocery store. And they'd cut them, and kids would push up that pineapple and eat it. Then we always had fresh apples, and kids would eat apples. Then, somehow, Dole or somebody figured out how to slice the apples and put them in packages, and they wouldn't turn brown.

FH: Right.

TH: I don't know how they do that, but, so kids now get a package of sliced apples, and they eat the sliced apples. And it's become a big deal, with broccoli and cauliflower. What else did they do with the small things, like small...

RK: Carrots, maybe?

TH: Oh, carrots were big. Oh, spinach—you can get these little bags of spinach now. Now, I made a little compromise, OK. They get a little plastic thing of lite ranch dressing or something. And they do that with the broccoli, too. They'll get a little plastic thing and dip it in. OK, fine, got to make some compromises along the way, but kids are eating fresh spinach. Now I'm coming back to what I heard on the radio this morning. This woman was saying you got to start with the kids earlier, because kids develop a taste. And I learned this later on, on my Health Committee, that when you're young and before you've smoked and drank and did all the things, like eating Kentucky Fried Chicken and all that junk food, that when you're young, you taste things differently than as an adult. So when a kid in grade school eats fresh fruit, it has much more of an impact on their taste buds than it does for you or me.

FH: Right.

TH: And the same with vegetables, too. Who likes steamed, wilted broccoli? I don't. But broccoli that's crisp and fresh, kids will eat that stuff up. And that's [Unclear] like even spinach—they might dip it a little bit, but it just tastes good. They get this little baby spinach things in the plastic bags. So my idea was if you get kids eating this and liking it, they'll tell their parents, and their parents will buy more of it. We had hearings on this, and I'd never had any real hard data, but mostly anecdotal about parents now buying stuff, because their kids say—I want to eat that at home. Now here's the last I'm going to go off on this long tirade—because this was a really favorite program of mine. When we initially got this through I had to make a compromise. I didn't like it, but we allowed dried fruit. When I became chairman again in '08, I took that out, got rid of it, because that's just concentrated sugar. Well, I remember Debbie Stabenow having me up in Michigan—and who else was it? Michigan and New Jersey. Cranberries—they want these dried cranberries that are just soaked with sugar, so I met with, up there, some of their cranberry people. Oh, they wanted grape juice into the thing, too. That's not ... we don't have orange juice; we don't have grape juice—we don't have that; it's just concentrated sugar. So I had to meet with all of her cranberry people and her grape people, and I finally said—Debbie, look how much sugar's in there. Not in front of them, when we were—I said, Debbie, look, we can't do this. Debbie started ... I shouldn't ... well, I can say this is

historical—when Debbie came she was quite large. She went on this tremendous diet program and reduced, so I hit her at the right time, and said—look, blame me. Tell all those people that you're for them, but Harkin's the chair, and he refuses it, and he's got the votes. Just blame me—so she did. [Chuckles] So she blamed me for it. And then George Miller from California, my dear friend, he was always on my rear end about getting the dried fruit back in, but we were able to keep it out. We were able to keep it out. And then the nut people wanted in. And, you know, there are certain nuts that are healthy. Walnuts, almonds, pistachios are ... tree nuts are good. But I told them no, you're not—this is fresh fruit and vegetable. Well, these are healthy. I got that, but as soon as we open the door to you, the peanut people are right behind you. [Chuckles] Because the peanut people wanted in. Who the dickens else wanted ... oh, now there's a bill, as we sit here today, there's a bill in the House by some guy from Maine to open up the program again, not only for the dried fruit, but for canned fruit—the little cans of fruit cocktail and peaches—just sugar. So it's an ongoing struggle.

FH: Ongoing struggle, indeed. [Chuckles]

TH: Ongoing, though, to keep it fresh fruits and vegetables. It's gotten so big. I think now we have the produce people, Ferd, who are ... you know who they are, the lobbyists.

FH: United Fresh and...

TH: United Fresh.

FH: Fruit and vegetables.

TH: I don't ... United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable people are now geared up for this. Well, obviously it's in their economic interest, too, but I think it's in all our interests to have, to keep that program going. Anyway, that's a long story.

FH: Well, you know, really, the 2002 Farm Bill, you get the Snack Program in, and you get Farmers Market Promotion Program in, and organic certification, and now all of that is now in the horticulture title of the farm bill, which didn't exist back then, but now we've ... now it's a given that fruits and vegetables are part of the farm bill.

TH: There's a horticulture section of it?

FH: There's a title called horticulture, and it's got the organic programs, it's got the specialty crop block grant, it's got farmers market promotion program. All of that is packaged together.

TH: I need to get a briefing from you again as to what all these recently [Unclear]

FH: [Unclear]

TH: Once I retired...

FH: So, you know, all those things that you championed in 2002 have now grown into its own title of the farm bill, so that's progress.

TH: That's nice!

FH: That's really progress.

TH: That's nice to know. Well, when you just keep the canned fruit and the peanuts and the nut people out of the Snack Program and enlarge the Snack Program even more ... and that leads me on to the ... well, that's something I was only peripherally involved in and that's changing the school lunch program, to making it more healthy foods and stuff. I have to give Tom more credit, Tom Vilsack, on that one. But we were involved in it, in having hearings, I remember, and promoting moving to a ... oh, one thing that I'd been involved in for years ... was it on the Ag Committee, or was it ... no, it was on the Health Committee—getting soft drinks out of high schools. Well, we finally succeeded, finally got that done. So there's some progress, I guess.

FH: Yeah, indeed.

RK: Well, Ferd, I was wondering if you had anything more to add to this kind of area or not. If not, we can move on to [Unclear]

FH: Yeah, go ahead, sure.

RK: Thinking about looking forward. If you were not retired and wanted to think about, well, what didn't we get accomplished, or what do we need to take to the next level, or even beyond farther—just generally, what do you think the policy priorities should be for Ferd and his crew, going forward, to really advance organic and sustainable ag, healthier rural communities—you know, my little town in Iowa, drying up, you know, like they all are. What needs to be done in that whole area?

TH: Gosh, that's a lot. Well, first of all, focusing more of our money on beginning farmers programs and getting young people to understand you can make a decent living on not a lot of land, and there's ... things have a wave action; things cycle back and forth. Even before I left the Senate, I picked up that more and more young people were thinking this might be a good life. I may not get real rich; I may not get on Wall Street, but there's something to be said for family and rural living, that kind of lifestyle, but you gotta have an income. So, again, the constant challenge, I think, for us is to take that money that we're putting into agriculture and quit giving it to these big farmers that are making a lot of money and focus it on these beginning farmers, giving them the wherewithal to both do organics, farmers markets, buying land, rural development. That's another thing. I mean, we've done a decent job in Iowa, although there's a place up in northwest Iowa and Minnesota we haven't finished yet—I'm talking about rural water.

RK: Oh, yeah.

TH: Getting clean rural water to people. Some people think it's a no-brainer, but it costs money, and we've done some of it, but we need to do a lot more. We need a lot more money put into conservation. Well, the conservation kind of programs we've been talking about. Even after all of this, streams and rivers near where I live in Iowa are so polluted you would not want to swim in it. See ... you shouldn't ask me a question like that!

FH: [Chuckles]

TH: What's happen ... I remember telling my Farm Bureau people come in—you can't farm like your grandpas did. It no longer works. Why? Well, because in Iowa, when my dad was younger and stuff, he did a lot of tiling. Red clay tile, dig these trenches and put those tiles in. They were horribly inefficient, and they leaked. You didn't cement them together, you just laid them down and they leaked, but they did a pretty good job. And that took a lot of work and a lot of time, so you had to be at an area where you could get a really good return to put the tile in. Well, what happened, they came up with these tiling machines that just go right through a farm, and they got this plastic pipe with the holes in it, and they can lay tile like you can't believe. So we've tiled land in Iowa that was not really tiled before, or if it was tiled, those tiles all filled in and stuff, and they put this new stuff in. By God, it rains now, and it gets into that stuff, and it shoots right into the ditches, shoots into the streams, and what's it taking with it? All the nitrogen, all the phosphorus, all that stuff that farmers continue to put on their land or from the CAFOs, the big hog operations and stuff. They say—well, we put them in ponds and stuff—yeah, right. Yes, but they all leak. We all know that, that they leak. And so we find the city of Des Moines now spending lots of money, taking the pollutants out of the water, just to drink. Well, if you want young people to stay in these small towns and stuff, they've got to have clean water, they need healthcare, they need education services. And they'd like to have some recreation areas. The Raccoon River, near where I lived—when I was a kid we swam in it, we fished, we ate the fish out of it—you wouldn't do that; I don't think there are any fish left in it, it's so damn polluted, and you wouldn't swim in it. So focus on those kinds of things, and you'll find young people saying they just ... this is something ... but we need schools, health care, extension services, community health centers that can reach out to small communities. I've been involved with community health centers in Iowa and getting money for building the community ... we built one up near northwest Iowa ... anyway, we got one started, and then I got some money for a mobile office, a mobile community health facility that would go out to all these small towns and stuff, and it had a dental service in it—not a dentist, but someone who would check your teeth and say—you need to go to a dentist, and here's what you need to do. They would do blood work—not there, but they would take blood samples and they would take care of it. They would do things for babies, expectant mothers, just on this mobile office. It was a huge success, and guess—we lost it. We lost it when Katrina hit, and the people down there wanted it. So it went down to Louisiana, and we haven't seen it since. But just things like that. But it costs money, and no one will pay for it. That's why I say we have enough money in agriculture; it just needs to be redirected, refocused. Will that ever happen? Bit by bit, piece by piece, I hope so.

FH: Yeah, it...

TH: Excuse me, Ferd—I just thought of something else. OK, we have a group of people in Iowa—this is down the Maharishi-Yogi...

RK: Fairfield?

TH: In Fairfield, Iowa. Now, they have built a lot of greenhouses, and they're growing vegetables in the middle of the winter. They're heating them—what are they called? Tunnels?

FH: Hoop houses or high tunnels.

TH: Yeah, hoop houses or something like that, right?

FH: Um-hum.

TH: But that costs money. They're using natural gas, some solar. But they have markets in Chicago for all of these fresh fruits. So it costs a lot of money to get it going. Now, I don't know if they're breaking even now or not. If they are, maybe, but it costs a lot of up-front money to get this going and that kind of thing. I've often thought—why can't we do that for smaller farmers, where you might not have the biggest operation they have—you could have a smaller operation. We have the energy programs, where they can access energy—not funded enough—so they could produce maybe enough energy to keep these warm. And then my idea was to have a cooperative system, where you'd have a lot of these people doing it. They would have a co-op, they would bring it to a central place, and then that central place could then market it somewhere else. I still think it's an idea worth pursuing.

FH: Yeah, and you're beginning to see some of that.

TH: Are we?

FH: Yeah. I think there's kind of a new interest in co-op because individual farmers doing all the transportation themselves is really time consuming, not to mention costly. You're seeing distribution kind of co-ops come back on the landscape, which I think could be really important for making that shift. Also, in the EQIP Program now—this was a Tom Vilsack thing—there's now you can get money from EQIP to put up hoop houses to grow vegetables in the winter. So that's...

TH: So an individual farmer can get money from EQIP?

FH: Yeah.

TH: To put up these things.

FH: Yeah, which has been very...

TH: Is that just for animals, or is that for...

FH: No, no, this is for vegetables.

TH: Oh, no kidding!

FH: Yeah.

TH: I'm sure glad I'm having this interview—I'm learning things I didn't even...

FH: Yeah, that's been since only the last six or seven years now, but it's really taken off, and it's quite popular, so...

TH: Would you tell me where I can read up on some of this?

FH: Yeah, sure.

TH: I'd like to know about aspects of it.

FH: Another thing that's still going that you did, which was to put organic inside of EQIP, that would have been in 2008, Senator Gillibrand, but then at that time Representative Gillebrand had the companion bill in the house, and you had it in the Senate. That's still going, so there's an organic initiative within EQIP where you can get money to transition to...

TH: That's music to my ears, because I never liked EQIP, because it always went to these big CAFOs. They were sucking up all this money—they probably still are.

FH: They're still in the game. And irrigation is big on EQIP now, too. That's probably the biggest use of EQIP today is irrigation equipment.

TH: Oh—and that's, well that's something else I have a problem with. Boy.

FH: Yeah, it really has never made up its mind—is it a program to help put on structures, like irrigation, or is it a program to help farmers produce in more environmentally sustainable ways. It never, quite ever makes up its mind which kind of program it is, but the more things like the organic initiative and the hoop house initiative that can get in there, at least it gives options for people.

RK: We're very grateful for your time, and, Ferd, for the good questions stimulating this conversation. You've got the ongoing work of the National Sustainable Ag Coalition going forward, and we're very grateful...

TH: I hope you guys are financially OK.

FH: Yeah, we're doing all right, yup.

RK: So, thank you very much.

TH: Well, thanks, Ron. And I'll just say this to you—if there's some follow-up sometime you can do you want to do on the phone or something like that, I don't remember a lot of this stuff

like Ferd does. I mean, he knows all this stuff. In fact, thank you, you sent me some stuff to refresh my memory, and I really appreciate that.

FH: Oh, good.

TH: So, if there's something else...

RK: Good. Thank you.

TH: Get a hold of me in Iowa, OK?

FH: Sounds good.

TH: Thanks for having me

FH: Great to see you.

TH: Good to see you again, friend.

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