

**Liz Henderson**  
**Narrator**

**Ron Kroese**  
**Interviewer**

**December 14, 2017**

**Liz Henderson—LH**  
**Ron Kroese—RK**

**RK:** This is Ron Kroese. Today is December 14, 2017, and I am in Atlanta, Georgia at the annual meeting of the Domestic Fair Trade Association, where I have the pleasure of interviewing Elizabeth Henderson, pioneering CSA farmer and longtime activist for local and national policies and programs to advance socially and economically just sustainable agriculture, both in the US and abroad. Liz, your many policy accomplishments included helping shape the landmark Organic Food and Policy Act of 1990, serving early-on as a board member of the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York, and serving as a founding board member of the Agriculture Justice Project. I hope we can cover all of those topics in the next hour, but I like to start all of my interviews I'm doing for the Sustainable Agriculture Oral History Archive by going back to the beginning of your life, all the way back to your childhood. What got you interested in food and farming, as well as justice and fairness issues?

**LH:** Well, as my father used to say, I was born at a very young age to parents who were totally city people. Their idea of being in the country was playing tennis. They never gardened; they didn't even mow the lawn—they hired someone else to do that. They had been very much involved in civil rights and struggles for peace and justice all of their lives, and kind of inherited it, I think, in my family. My mother's uncles were involved in the revolution of 1905 in Poland, which was unsuccessful, so when they lost that revolution, they fled and came to the United States. They were union activists, union organizers, and just solid unionists. So I was raised by people who were concerned with peace and justice. My mother helped raise funds—she filled Madison Square Garden to raise money in the '30s.

**RK:** For union workers?

**LH:** Yeah, for union workers, and helped to get the first low-income housing in New York City.

**RK:** Wow. So that, 1930s, that would have been right at the beginning of the Great Depression when things were really getting rough on people.

**LH:** Right. And my father, although he was a dress designer and, I suppose, a very small-scale capitalist, he convinced the owners of the factory that produced the dresses that he designed to allow their workers to recognize the union that their workers wanted to create. So the Garment Workers Union unionized the factory where my father's dresses were made.

**RK:** That's really interesting. I can imagine that one of the things that's been troublesome for you in your life is seeing the sort of deterioration of unionism in the country and all of the work that your relatives put into it, and seeing...

**LH:** Yeah, there is that link. But I grew up very much aware of those kinds of issues, and going to public school in the '50s, where we were taught that there was one true way to understand everything, I knew that there were other ways and got into intellectual conflict with some of my teachers. For example, our textbook, our American history textbook, in the 1950s, in Croton-on-Hudson, New York, said—and this is a quote—the darkies were happy down on the old plantation. So for my next book report I reported on Nat Turner's slave rebellion, which made my American history teacher very angry.

**RK:** Wow. So, then, where did you go to college when you...

**LH:** Well, before I went to college, in high school I was totally disaffected, and my parents wanted to cheer me up, so they sent me to the Putney Summer Work Camp, which was located on a beautiful farm in Vermont, and that's where I encountered the country. My assignment was to help the farmer clean out the dairy barn every morning. And I loved doing that. I had no idea that that existed. And we also did some field work, and at the end of the season spent a whole day canning beans for the winter school. But that's how I discovered that there was such a thing as agriculture and people doing it out in the country.

**RK:** Maybe your parents had a sense of it from you or something. That was very wonderful that that happened that way, it seems to me.

**LH:** Well, what I learned about things natural and ecological from my parents was reading Marx, who was very much an ecologist, and through modern dance. Isadora Duncan and her very important struggle for women's place in dance and choreography and for the natural in the human body. So that's how I came to organic agriculture—not the usual path.

**RK:** Definitely not. And then where did you actually go to college then?

**LH:** I went to Barnard College. In college I participated in the civil rights movement, but not like many people who went to the South. It seemed to me there was plenty to do right there in New York City. So my main activity was working in support of the performers who led a struggle against the New York City Theater Producers Association to demand better roles for performers of color. So I walked miles and miles on picket lines with people like James Earl Jones and Ozzie Dee and Ruby Davis and Cicely Tyson. So that was successful—we actually won those struggles and they got much better roles.

**RK:** And then you had that academic career for awhile before you moved towards farming, right?

**LH:** Well, I was a good student, and my high school sweetheart was a very brilliant historian. He knew he was going to be an historian from the age of eight. He wrote his first history of the

United States when he was eight. For him an academic career really made sense, and I just went along with him because I could do it, and I studied Russian language and literature and really loved Russian literature. I've read all of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy—I mean all of it, everything that they wrote, in the original. Turgenev, Gogol—I learned a lot about peasants. Then my husband was killed in a car crash a year after our child was born, and I went on teaching for awhile. I got my first real appointment at Boston University, and I hated many things about academia. The hierarchy—the president of Boston University at that time was a man named John Silber, who believed that philosophers should be king, and since he was a professor of philosophy, he thought he should be king of our university. And I really didn't want to be associated with that. This latest thing of women speaking out about humiliating and sexist things that have been done to them—the senior professor in my little Russian section, on our first interview to discuss what I would be teaching with him, he reached over and he pinched my cheek. Oh! And I got up and I walked out and I never went in his office again, but there was nothing I could do about that.

**RK:** No. So then you were probably really getting the itch to move out into the country, or how did that evolve? How did you get into the CSA world? When, about, was that?

**LH:** Well, I taught, I moved to Boston in 1975 or '6, and I became friendly with a group of people who were talking about creating a university in the country where the students and teachers together would build a farm and build the houses, and then instruction would be free as part of this rural community. Unfortunately, most of them were students of Noam Chomsky at MIT, and extraordinarily super-intellectual. They didn't know which end of the cow you milked. I mean, literally, they didn't. And when I brought friends who were crafts people, carpenters or farmers, to our gatherings, they would stagger out after one meeting and never want to go back, because the level of intellectual discussion was so ... just so very intellectual and unpractical. And those people never really did get their thing started, because they wanted the entire judicial system to be set up before they even bought land. So they were haggling over clauses and bylaws and things, instead of learning how to grow food. So with some friends I went looking for a farm in the country, because I was really tired of Boston, and the final kick-off for me was there was some kind of chemical spill. The whole city was pervaded by the smell of this cancer-causing chemical, whatever it was. And my son by that time was in ... I guess he was in first grade. And his school kind of panicked, and instead of sending them home on the school bus, they gave them each a quarter or something to take a public bus home. Well, my son had never taken a public bus. Luckily, he had a more savvy friend, so they did make it home, but I just lost confidence in that school system. I wanted out of there. So we were able to find this broken-down old farm in Gill, Massachusetts. It was actually half of a farm. The farmer's wife had died. The dairy farmer himself was a bit addled and confused, and people talked about him delivering butter with hairs in it. [Chuckles] And he was still around, but he wasn't functioning very well. Another dairy farmer bought half of the land, and we bought half of the land with a burned-down farmhouse and barn, and started from scratch. And I had zero skills. I had done a little bit of gardening. By that time I had already connected with the Northeast Organic Farming Association, so I'd been to some of the early 1970s conferences, and that's how I started to farm.

**RK:** So you found some mentoring there to guide you.

**LH:** I learned to farm by reading about French market gardening, market farming, and visiting France, and then by going to NOFA conferences and visiting other people's farms, working for other people. I couldn't do an apprenticeship, because I don't think they existed at that time. And besides I had a child, so it would have been difficult to do that. So, I would hire myself out for a few days with whoever I wanted to learn from. I'd go work for free, and people were happy to do that, and I could learn things from them. And then in the Pioneer Valley area there were a number of people who were starting to do organic farming. Nancy Galland and Richard Stander, Wally and Juanita Nelson—we all formed a little study group and met once a month and read and learned about organic farming. We discovered, for example—I was in charge one month of reading about natural pesticides, and I discovered that Rotenone was implicated in the onset of Parkinson's Disease, because at that time Rodale was saying—oh, it's wonderful and you can use it everywhere. We decided that it shouldn't be used, because it was actually a dangerous mixture, even though it was natural. And then we helped one another out. So, on my farm, which we called Unadilla after the stream that went through the farm. We built a solar greenhouse, which was a very nice greenhouse, and worked quite well. I did starts for everybody, so Juanita Nelson, to reciprocate for my starting plants for her, paid me the first year in soap that she had made, and the next year I still had soap; it was like five years' worth of wonderful soap. So she and Wally came and worked at my farm for a day. We did things like forage together in restaurant basements for boxes to pack our vegetables in. Wally and Juanita helped start the farmers market in Greenfield, Massachusetts, and they were really leaders in tax resistance. They had a small garden which was their only living at the Trap Rock Peace Center, and they were kind of the spiritual grandparents of most of us in that area, really wonderful people.

**RK:** I'm glad you mentioned them—that's one thing I'm asking people to do, to mention people that mentored them who deserve a lot of credit for getting things going back then.

**LH:** Yeah, they just farmed on half an acre and lived on the proceeds of that, because they didn't want to earn more money. They only wanted to earn enough to not have to pay taxes or deal with the tax man. Juanita wrote a wonderful piece, a poem, *Outhouse Blues*.

**RK:** I read the poem—you sent it to me—it's very good.

**LH:** And they considered my farm a really big farm. Altogether we had 69 acres, but there were only four acres of vegetables. And then I became close friends with Benjie and Jacques Lasseau, who had imported Jacob sheep from Scotland. So I exchanged some young sheep for plants that I had started, chestnut trees. We were trying to get chestnuts that would grow. And they mentored me in taking care of those sheep. So we had a small flock of sheep and we produced plants and sold them, and initially I tried every kind of marketing that I could find. I sold at the farmers market, I sold to restaurants, I joined the Pioneer Valley Growers Association, which was a marketing cooperative; I was the only woman farmer and the only organic farmer in the group, and I took a lot of teasing. Oh, I had Captan for breakfast.

**RK:** [Chuckles] Oh, I can imagine.

**LH:** But the farmers in that group who have survived as farmers have subsequently become organic.

**RK:** They have?

**LH:** Yes. So it's been interesting to watch their progress over the years. And they were kind of amazed that my first commercial crop was leeks, that we managed to actually produce some very nice-looking leeks. And there was a German woman, I don't recall her name, who was their marketing manager, and she taught all of us and me in particular how to prepare things to sell, to market, how to pack, and what was acceptable, what size, things like that. And if you didn't have it the way she wanted it, you took it home. So you learned quickly under her rather strict tutelage.

**RK:** Or else you'd get a lot of leeks.

**LH:** She was the first woman to do marketing in the Boston public market. It was very much a men's game at that time, but she was a tough cookie.

**RK:** So then, along the way then, one of the things you're known for is the Consumer Supported Agriculture and moving directly more into a CSA relationship, right?

**LH:** Well, I didn't start doing that at the farm in Massachusetts because my partners there weren't interested in doing that. I was a friend of Robin Van En, and that's how I heard about CSA. But in 1988-89, I moved to New York State, to Rose Valley Farm in Rose, New York, in Wayne County, joining, as a partner, David Stern. And he agreed to try and do a CSA, because it was already quite obvious to us in Wayne County, New York, where we couldn't sell at the Ithaca Farmers Market. There just weren't really good markets, and it was obvious that larger-scale farms in California, organic farms, were going to be underselling us pretty quickly, so we needed a way to support the farm with people who would be like our steady supporters and join our club. Of course, in the winter of 1988-89, when we started our CSA, nobody had heard of the idea of paying in advance to get fresh vegetables from an organic farm. But in the city of Rochester there was an organization called the Politics of Food, headed up by Allison Clark, and she got the idea right away, so she helped us find people to join. She already had a network of people in Rochester who realized the importance of locally grown food, and some of them even understood about organic food. So we had our first recruiting meetings near the food co-op in Rochester, and the people who signed up, I later came to learn, were all people who were either environmental or peace activists of different kinds, people who were very aware of those issues. So our first season in 1989 was an experiment, and the idea was that everybody would come out to the farm—not all at once, but take turns coming out—and helping with the harvesting, drive the food back into the city, and then in the city the members would do distribution themselves without the farmers being present. Because the idea was they would share the risk with us and take on those parts of the work that they could do every bit as well as we could. So we figured out what jobs had to be done, and members took jobs, and we had a very solid core group which, as the CSA expanded to—while I was at Rose Valley I think we got up to 160—and the core group got to be over 20 people who committed to jobs like overseeing distribution, organizing all the people who oversaw distribution, because eventually there were eight or ten of them. They took turns each distribution day, and we had two a week. The schedulers. There were two people who shared the job of being treasurer, so they collected all the money from the members and just

sent us a check—we didn't have to chase anybody for money. Someone put out the newsletter. One of the members convinced me—well insisted—that I had to learn how to use a computer, and that the World Wide Web was going to be how we were going to advertise our farm. And I said—that's ridiculous! Why would you need the worldwide web to advertise a local farm to local people? And, of course, he was right. But he actually came out to the farm with a computer and taught me how to use it. So our partnership with those city people was a very close one. But they were organized as a buying club. It was a separate group that partnered with the farm, very much in the model of the Japanese Teikei farms, or the CSAs that were set up in New York City by Just Food. They would organize a core group of members who would partner with farmers.

**RK:** I'm quite familiar with the CSA efforts in the Midwest, Minnesota and Iowa. One of the things that I'm hearing from people is that, well, the CSA movement did so much, but that it's in some trouble nowadays because of all the organic food and Whole Foods, and other ways of getting it, that some of the CSA farmers now are losing some of their customers. Coupled with the fact that there are more people trying to establish CSAs, more growers and so it's an issue nowadays.

**LH:** Well, I think the answer is to make the pie bigger, not to fight over the pie. And our CSA was one of the most participatory, and everybody did something, so none of the members were paid for doing those jobs. And since my background was more as an organizer, I staffed that, and recruited new members for the core group and made sure that things ran well. And I really enjoyed doing that work.

**RK:** And it's clear, then, that the folks that you were working with, at least in the core, had a commitment that was deeper than just getting a box of vegetables.

**LH:** Right. Yeah, the people who joined the core group were people who had greater understanding, some of them maybe not initially, but they came to really understand the importance of organic and locally grown food and supporting local farms and what that meant to the local economy and what that meant to the future of this world to have organic farms in existence and small-scale farms have had a struggle in this country. At least for a century we've been losing farms. In my lifetime this country has lost five million farms. And I went into farming knowing about that history and that's why I think CSA appealed to me, because it was a way of getting a fair deal for the farmer, and for the farmer not having to bear the entire burden of struggling against a system that is really stacked against you. So the members of my core group, when we started sharing our farm budget with them, and when they realized how little my partner and I were earning, they took the lead in saying we have to raise our share price, pay them more, so that this budget will include health insurance and a retirement fund for our farmers.

**RK:** Good. Well, that's something that should still be done all over the place, obviously.

**LH:** Well, as I said I was a friend of Robin Van En, and she had written a very little book, *It's Not Just About Vegetables*, and everybody was on her—Robin, you have to write a book about CSA, how to do CSA, all the people you've visited and talked to, and examples, and Robin just wasn't doing it, so I offered to help her, because I like to write, and we started working on the

book together. We wrote an outline, and six months later we met up again, and I had written the first couple of chapters, and Robin hadn't written anything. So I said, well, I'll take another chapter, and we met six months later, and I'd written my chapter, and she still hadn't written anything. So then we had a heart-to-heart talk and I learned from her that she was working three part-time jobs, and she was just too distracted to sit down and write. So I, at that time, was a member of the administrative council of Northeast SARE, the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program. And I pitched to them the idea of them providing a stipend for Robyn so that she could just write the book. So SARE put up \$10,000 towards *Sharing the Harvest*, the book that we were working on. And that went to Robin, who then still was not able to ... she finally got started, and then she died of asthma. She owed money to the hospital and the ambulance corps there, and so when she had an asthma attack, a friend came to try and help her go to the hospital and the key froze in the lock—it was January—and by the time they futzed around and got the car started, Robin was gone.

**RK:** Oh, no!

**LH:** So I took over the book and dedicated it to her and whatever funds we got initially went to her son to help support him.

**RK:** I read about the book, and I'd like to have you mention the exact title so we can have that on the record.

**LH:** The title is *Sharing the Harvest: A Citizen's Guide to Community Supported Agriculture*, and it has now been translated into first Japanese. I went to an IFOAM conference. IFOAM is the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements. I think it was the second one I went to, and it was in Canada, and I suddenly found myself surrounded by these Japanese people, and I didn't really quite understand what was going on. It turned out they were members of the Japanese Organic Agriculture Association, and they wanted to tell me that they wanted to translate my book into Japanese and have me come to Japan and do a tour of Teikei farms, because they were having trouble recruiting people in the younger generation, and they saw that in the United States most of the members were young families, and they thought maybe I had some ideas that I could share with them. So I actually did that; it was quite an amazing experience. They also thought, though, that I was president of the United States' national CSA organization and set up a special meeting of their board, of the Japanese Organic Agriculture Association, where they were going to report to me about their work, and they expected me to tell them about my organization, and I had the embarrassing job of saying, well, actually we don't have one, and I'm not the president. [Both chuckle] But then, from the Japanese, people in Taiwan got wind of it and translated it into classical Chinese, and then when Shi Yan came to the United States and learned about CSA in Minnesota and took CSA back to China, she translated the book into mainland Chinese. The book has sold more copies in China; the first edition of 10,000 sold out really quickly. She started the first CSA in 2008. There are now over a thousand in China—it's spreading very quickly. It's a grassroots organic movement in China that we know very little about here, and it's quite different from the top-down, certified organic, government controlled organic that's going on there.

**RK:** That's a wonderful legacy you have there. That's really something.

**LH:** And then it was translated into Thai, and then most recently into Spanish. [Spanish translation].

**RK:** Wonderful, wonderful. That's got to feel really good to see that happening like that. That's so good. I got to interview Garth Youngberg about the *Report and Recommendations on Organic Farming* that he and others wrote. It would have been in 1979, or 1980 it came out...

**LH:** Nineteen-eighty.

**RK:** ... right before Reagan came in, and Reagan's administration tried to suppress it. But he told me that ultimately it was translated into seven languages, that report, too. So there is a hunger around the planet for this kind of information.

**LH:** From writing about my own CSA experience, in which I do highly pitch the idea of gathering a core group around you, and many farmers are resistant to that. They don't want to share control or have no idea of how to organize a group of supporters, so I think it's really missing an opportunity. And that core group still exists to this day, although some sad things have happened with the farm. Eventually what happened with ... I moved from Rose Valley Farm because my partner and I didn't agree on many things, and I think one of the things was he really didn't want all those people coming to the farm for the CSA. So I started over again, and we named the farm Peacework, on land that initially my partner, Greg Palmer, who had been an intern at Rose Valley, came and became my partner at Peacework. We leased land from Doug Kraai and Becky Kraai, and Doug was one of the founding members of NOFA in New York State. He had a herd of buffalo, this big strong, strapping guy, a wonderful conservationist, not much of a businessman. But he, after five years there he passed away of a glioblastoma. It's the same kind of cancer that Sen. McCain has. It can be ... well, in Doug's case he went from appearing to be healthy; 40 days later he was gone. So Becky offered to sell the farm to us. But a couple of the members of our core group were also on the board of the Genesee Land Trust, so we all worked together with the land trust and worked out a deal where a woman named Suzanne Wheatcraft, who was on both groups, led a fundraising campaign, which we called Preserving Peacework, where we raised enough money, mainly from the members of the CSA, to purchase the farm for the land trust, and then the land trust leases it back to the farm business. So I worked closely with Gay Mills, who's the executive director of the Genesee Land Trust, in developing a lease, which is partly based on land trust leases, but partly based on community land trust language, so that the farm remains affordable for the next farmers, and it can't be sold as real estate, it remains as farm land in perpetuity. But the people who lease it have to make at least 50 percent of their living as ecological farmers on that land.

**RK:** Well, that was another area, then, that has been really important as far as getting that spread around to those kind of leases and land trust relationships for working lands, not just for lands that we've set aside for ecological reasons, but working farmlands being protected like that.

**LH:** Yeah. That made it really possible for my partners and I to buy that land—or, we didn't buy it—to use that land, because the money that we had for starting Peacework just came from the

insurance money that I had gotten from the car crash in which my husband was killed. That was my capital, and I laundered it by putting it in soil.

**RK:** Well, good. This has been so fascinating, and I would like to move on a little bit over into the policy realm more directly, although all of this good grassroots work—you mentioned 1989. I know you became involved then on what became the Organic Food Production Act in Washington, DC, to actually ... I'd like to have you talk a little bit about that and what that was like, going to Washington and working on that.

**LH:** Well, I was a founding member of NOFA in Massachusetts. NOFA is seven chapters, and they have an interstate council which meets about six times a year. In '88-'89, the interstate council decided to send a representative to the first meeting that was held nationally of organic farmers, which became the ... OFAC, the Organic Farmers Association Council. So I was NOFA's representative to that first meeting in Leavenworth, Kansas, and it was at that meeting that Kathleen Merrigan presented the first draft of what became the Organic Food Production Act. In her first draft, the entire responsibility for certification was put in the hands of state departments of agriculture. There were good programs in Texas and Oregon, but in most states that was just not a reasonable thing to do. In New York state the commissioner of ag and markets at that time was going around saying that organic was a fake—you can't tell the difference between organic food and conventional food. Our board actually had a meeting with him where we got him to agree to stop defaming organic. But ag and markets still refused to put their seal of New York quality on a bag that had a certified organic label on it. My farm applied for that seal for our carrots, which were beautiful, and they refused to let us have it. So I knew that a department of agriculture like that was not an appropriate apparatus for doing organic certification. So as one of the people who became the leadership of OFAC, I got sucked into, really, working on the Organic Food Production Act, and that was really a hard and nerve-wracking experience, because the OFAC leadership—we had representatives from CCOF [California Certified Organic Farmers] and MOFGA [Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association] and the NOFAs, the people who are most active—Washington Tilth, Anne Schwartz. OOGA people were active—the Ozark Organic Growers. None of us had ever worked on legislation in Washington, DC. We didn't know how things worked, how to go about anything. And we had these endless conference calls that summer; calls would go on for over three hours, working through the language of the Organic Foods Production Act, trying to develop our positions on what we wanted in that act. And Lynn Coody was one of the people involved with OFAC, and she came up with the language that is in the bill that is used to decide which materials can be used in organic, the criteria by which materials are judged. And that was really our major contribution to that piece of legislation, lobbying for that.

**RK:** It actually took another decade before it was put into law, too, right?

**LH:** Right. Tom Forster was our representative in Washington, DC, and he also had had no experience in Washington, DC. Kathy Ozer took him under her wing and then I guess ... I don't think ... NSAC was not in existence then, so it was really Kathy Ozer who helped him. So we were babes in the woods and made a lot of mistakes.

**RK:** And Michael Sligh came in there somewhere, too, didn't he? Because he was involved, I think.

**LH:** Yes, he did. I got to know Michael not in '89 but a little bit later. Roger Blobaum had organized those...

**RK:** I interviewed Roger.

**LH:** ... meetings in Washington, trying to pull together people from sustainable agriculture, and then when OFAC just didn't have the resources to continue, we took our last bit of money and pooled them with the National Dialog for Sustainable Agriculture, which then became the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture, and it was at those national campaign meetings in Washington that I met Michael, because one of the committees that we would have meet at those gatherings was the organic committee. Michael and I became the chairs of that committee. So it was in that capacity that I worked on the legislation.

**RK:** And then ultimately the struggle like to ... I interviewed Joyce Ford and Jim Riddle and the efforts ... they got involved in coming over from Minnesota and trying to make sure that the materials, the whole struggle on what could be included in organic, what still exists today, goes on and on, but that was a big part of the whole effort, as I recall.

**LH:** But when the regulations did finally come out, Michael and I and the farm worker representatives, people from CATA (El Comite de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agrícolas, - The Farmworkers Support Committee), Nelson Carrasquillo, who were part of the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture, noticed that it said nothing about the people in organic agriculture. Nothing about fair prices for farmers or fair working conditions for the people who work on organic farms. And although that wasn't very highly developed internationally, it was definitely part of what organic agriculture meant and was about. It was supposed to promote the well-being of all of the people who participated in the agriculture as well as the earth. Justice for human beings as well as earth worms. So when we sent in comments to USDA about that, we got the answer—this is not in our purview. And it was then that Michael and, representing Nelson, Richard Mandelbaum from CATA, and Marty Mesh, from Florida Organic Growers. We started meeting back in 1997, I think. We might have had our first confab to talk about how are we going to keep fairness in organic agriculture. And those conversations led to the development of the Agricultural Justice Project and Food Justice Certification Standards for Fairness on Farms, and throughout the food chain from farm to table.

**RK:** And that work is still going on?

**LH:** That work is still going on, and it's very much an uphill struggle, because though there is much broader recognition amongst the buying public for the importance of organic, there's very little recognition for the struggles of the people who do all of the work for that food, and how underpaid both farmers are and, as a result, the people who work on their farms. That this country has cheap food, and the people who pay for that are the people who do the work in the food system.

**RK:** Um-hum—absolutely. Is there a label now that you’re satisfied with that could be accompanying like what USDA Organic, with another label, or how is that going?

**LH:** Well, we have a food justice certified label, which is very handsome. I don’t have a picture of it with me—it would be nice to show you. But we see it initially, at least, as an add-on to organic, because we’ve helped convene a couple of meetings of farm worker organizations from across the United States to talk about what fair trade would mean to them. One of the top things on their list is freedom from poisonous materials. So from the farm worker perspective, organic is really important, because they’re not exposed to toxic pesticides and herbicides.

**RK:** I know we see it in our co-op in Minnesota, particularly on coffee, some of the things like bananas, things like that.

**LH:** Well, that fair trade, that international fair trade label, there are any number of them. And, unfortunately, internationally there is not agreement on what “fair” means.

**RK:** Yeah, I bet.

**LH:** So some of those labels, like Equal Exchange, mean that there’s really an effort been made for fairness, all the way back to the people who do the work, and transparency throughout that food chain. But some of the other fair trade labels only mean that the farmer is getting a slightly better price than the conventional price in the international market and has nothing to say about the people who might be working on that farm. Trans-Fair USA or Fair Trade USA has finally got standards for the workers on the fair trade farms, but it’s taken a lot of pressure on them to get them to really pay attention, how to do that properly. I think they still do their interviews of farm workers as a group. In our food justice certification, the audit is done by a certifier, but also by a trained representative of a farm worker organization who interviews the workers separately from management, one by one, in confidence, in their native language. And that’s the way you get the real story.

**RK:** I bet, yes.

**LH:** If you have a room full of people, they’re not going to be able to tell you about abuses that have occurred.

**RK:** No. Well, I’m really glad our conversation went to that direction, because I know that kind of moves to my area I like to kind of wrap things up with is what do we do now. Because that clearly is one of the areas that has to continue to work on. The work of you and our videographer, Shelley (Rogers) and Marty is very important, with the videos that are being produced in this whole area. I think of this area of justice is one that’s just ... with organics getting broader understanding and acceptance, this is an area that has to be pursued.

**LH:** There are organic farmers who are making a decent living, a few. But most of the organic farmers I know, just like the family-scale conventional farmers, are making a living because someone in their family works off the farm, or they farm part-time. The health insurance come from somebody’s job as a nurse or a teacher. I don’t think people in the general public

understand what a struggle it is to be a farmer in this country. And it's not that those of us who are farming want to make a lot of money. We would just like to have a living wage and get enough from the sale of our products to pay living wages to the people who work on our farms. And that's what food justice certification is about. It's changing the whole paradigm so that the work is respected and properly remunerated. We can't talk about a sustainable agriculture if it isn't worth sustaining. An agriculture based on slave labor, even if it's using organic methods, isn't worth sustaining. So that's the work that needs to be done. And I think we need to find a way of reigniting the conversation around parity payments to farmers and find a way to have a system of payments that doesn't come from government subsidies, but where the government supports having prices that fully cover the costs of production and some kind of supply management so that we have the amount of food produced in this country that people need, so that the prices are high enough that everybody who works in the food chain is making a decent living at it. And that has to go all the way to the supermarket and the restaurant tables, too.

**RK:** Yes. Well, I just had the opportunity to interview Wendell Berry and his daughter Mary, who is now doing more and more the work with Wendell Berry at the Berry Center, and you just spoke exactly what he and Mary were largely talking about, how the tobacco program was sort of the last vestige, or one of them anyway, of the parity program. Tobacco aside, the principles of parity that were around that small-scale agriculture Wendell has written about repeatedly, and also calls for the same sort of thing today. We have to figure out some way to do that. So, good company there.

**LH:** I often think of something and then I find that Wendell has said it better than I could have. [Both chuckle]

**RK:** That's true for all of us, I think. That's very good. Well, I promised you we would spend an hour or so talking, so you've got other meetings and things to deal with today, but was there anything else that you can think of that you really wanted to get on the record with this interview?

**LH:** Well, I didn't talk very much about NOFA, the Northeast Organic Farming Association. I've been involved with NOFA since the '70s, and it truly is a grassroots organization, since at least half of its members are farmers or homesteaders. We always have a struggle having enough money to keep it going. We're not a bunch of well-heeled foodies. But NOFA and the other farming associations like it have been the ones that have spread the know-how of how to do organic farming and gardening through this country, and often not acknowledged. But since the '70s, we've been having annual conferences where farmers share what they've discovered with one-another and farm tours and workshops through the year. Farmer-to-farmer and gardener-to-gardener. That's been the other part of the work that I've tried to contribute to through both practical things that I've learned about—growing vegetables and the CSA organization as the way that farms, if they organize it well, can actually make a decent living and have some support.

**RK:** You were part of that now going back almost like three decades or something, right? And you're still part of it, right?

**LH:** Right. I'm still on the board of NOFA.

**RK:** Oh, are you?

**LH:** I've been on and off. There are term limits, so I do my term limit and then I cycle back on again after a year or two. And then I've also become the honorary president of Urgenci, which is the international CSA network, which is really picking up steam. Urgenci, together with IFOAM, have been able to convince the Food and Agriculture Organization that organic and family-scale organic farms all over the world are where you need to put your investments if you really want to solve world hunger and poverty. So lately Urgenci has an MOU with the food and agriculture organization, helped spread the word about CSA and direct sales. Short-circuit is what they call it in Europe, in the receiving countries, so that means Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, so some very exciting work of that kind is going on, and I've been able to help it a little bit, anyway.

**RK:** It's wonderful ... I know I've been looking at Michael Sligh's resume as well, growing understanding, or importance of the work of you, too, as the other countries and how that we have spread internationally, and what you can bring to that effort as well is really important, for sure.

**LH:** Well, some of it ... Michael says doing agricultural policy work is like watching a car rust. Some of it proceeds very slowly, but it's important to keep these messages alive and the hope that truth and justice will win out eventually.

**RK:** That's right. That's the faith that keeps...

**LH:** It's better to die struggling for that than to either fall into despair or sell out.

**RK:** That's right. I think we can end with that; that's a wonderful way to end. Thank you very much for this interview. Really appreciate it—and for all of the work you have done and continue to do. Please keep it up.

**LH:** As long as I can I will. Thank you.

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