

**CONNECTICUT 20TH CENTURY AGRICULTURAL HISTORY PROJECT
ORAL HISTORIES**

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LL: Luane Lange interviewing David Anderson in Wethersfield, Connecticut. Thank you very, very much for agreeing to do this. I know this is...you've just finished a very busy season and you're probably not done yet. Can you start by talking about where you were born and when?

DA: I was born in Hartford Hospital and I've lived at 165 Broad Street my entire life which is the home farm and my dad prior to that has lived...lived seventy-six years at the home farm.

LL: He was born here also?

DA: Right. He was born in this house.

LL: Do you know...what about your grandparents?

DA: My grandfather came here with his mother after his father died at the age of nine or ten, something like that, back to her home which is the Wells Farm. This was the Wells Farm which dates back to the Indians and first settlers. And he, J.R. Anderson, farmed up until 1914 or so on when my father took over. My dad ran the farm until April of 1960. He had vegetables and he had some dairy cows and then...before the Second World War, he got out of the dairy business. And then he retired in April of 1960 and that's when I took over at the age of twenty-three.

LL: Let's go back one second. Did...you said he got rid of the dairy herd during the war.

DA: Before the Second World War.

LL: Do you know why?

DA: Yes, around 1932 or something like that. When they started TB testing. They had a lot of problems the cows in this area.

LL: Interesting. Now, you want to say something about where we are connected...! mean, where Wethersfield...we're on the town green.

DA: Oh, we're on Broad Street Green which is probably where there was the first ten or twelve settlers. Went right around here. There was oh, there's many different names on the street and I can't tell, For---is one and Wells is another. I think there's Treat and several other names, old names that are...that go back to the original settlers.

LL: And...and the way it was laid out is the homes were near the green and then the land was behind it?

DA: Yes. Our land used to go through the Main Street and they used to put their animals out on the green for to feed at one time. And up 'til I think it was 1940 or 41 when the Silas Deane Highway went through. Broad Street was one of the main roads between Hartford and Middletown. Just Broad Street, Middletown Avenue down into over at Rocky Hill center and right down the old. Most of our fields are on a what they call a small plain and in the Wethersfield Meadows which is all subject to flood under certain conditions. Mostly the meadow is flooded by each year with the exception of I think, two year that I know of. '57's run and up in the plains it's a different elevation so it doesn't get flooded on. It was flooded in '84 but it hasn't been since then.

LL: Where does this flood water come from?

DA: Connecticut River which goes down by several of our fields. We're right on the river bank.

LL: How many acres were there then?

DA: We have ninety acres in the Wethersfield Meadows and then we farming some forty acres up on Elm Street area and of that we own probably close to thirty out of the forty. We only rent a couple small pieces.

LL: You rent it from other people?

DA: Correct.

LL: How far are you from Hartford?

DA: Oh, about, to downtown Hartford, probably less than ten miles.

LL: When you were growing up what do you remember it being like living in...on this farm?

DA: Well, at one time we had horses when I first was small. And then of course, tractors came more prevalent as time went on. I guess you'd say about the wartime we all shifted from the horses to all tractors and now in the '80's we went from gas tractors to diesel in the tractors primarily. Less...more efficiency. Better economics, repair.

LL: Do you have brothers and sisters?

DA: I have one older brother. He's two years and eight months older than I am.

LL: Did he stay in...?

DA: He left the farm when I was a senior in high school and went with the utility company. Then he went...retired from West Hartford Department. He used to live on this street but now he sold. He was up on the other side of town. And my niece now has bought a home across the street for me on this side and I have two nephews. I never married. They all are married and have children and my two nephews help part-time. They're both professional fire fighters. One is a Lieutenant in New Britain and the other one is a driver for New Britain, same Engine and House. They have a swing shift so that they...usually I have one out of the two here most of the time.

And back in about 1988,...we went into getting migratory labor, Jamaican help. It became very difficult to do the vegetable business with the high school part-time labor that we were able to get from around locally. They didn't seem to be working out well at all. They wouldn't come in on weekends and things like that, where we do probably sixty-five per cent of our business is Friday, Saturday and Sunday in production and sales. It became harder and harder to keep your product flow right. So that's why we went with the Jamaican help and we were very pleased with them.

And oh, I'd say five years ago I bought an older farmhouse on Elm Street which is right where the farmland is and I remodeled it and that's where I house my men now. And the house is probably...well, my home was built in 1878 and that house was probably built in oh, somewhere around 1800. It's built from the center chimney out.

It's in the area where they used to raise a lot of the Wethersfield onions at...in history you'll hear of Wethersfield onions, red onions. It was many acres in that area that was devoted to onions. They seemed to do well in that areas. Now there's no onions. Probably the most acreage in that area now is probably in sweet corn and small crops besides.

LL: What kind of crops did you have then? You took over the farm then...did you work with your uncles or...when you were growing up,...

DA: With my dad.

LL: All right, with your dad. So you moved back here. But then...

DA: My dad was one of five but his brothers, all of them left the farm.

LL: Yeah, so they...but you came back. This was your mother's home place.

DA: Mr. Anderson's mother's home place.

LL: Okay, all right. Oh, I see.

DA: And my father was one of five, the middle one, and he's the one that took over the farm.

LL: Did the others express any interest in...in farming at all?

DA: No, they...one uncle, after he retired, went to work for me on the roadside market on a seasonal basis and helped in the greenhouses. The one next door. He was just younger than my dad.

LL: So, sometimes in a family, the question comes up, is it the oldest the youngest and so this was a matter of who was interested in...

DA: Right.

LL: And then you worked with him and then you said you took over when you were twenty...?

DA: 1960, after he had an...emergency stomach operation. He thought he was going to die, I guess. And he announced all of a sudden he was going to retire. Nobody ever realized he was going to retire quite like that, but he did. And I took over April 2, 1960. So the year two thousand in April, I'll be at the helm for forty years. And I belong to a volunteer Fire Department.

LL: Oh, you do too.

DA: My brother did and my dad did the same place, and in the year two thousand in September, I'll have forty-five years with the fire service in Wethersfield. Right now, I'm number one man as far as service to the town fire.

LL: Wonderful. What...how did...did you learn your farm...your farming skills and experiences and knowledge from your dad, primarily?

DA: Yes, right and then my brother did go the University of Connecticut for one year to Ratcliffe Hicks back in '52 Then things were very tough at that time and he came home to help and he helped my father until '55 when I graduated and then I stay...I've been on the farm ever since.

LL: What were some of the crops...

DA: The crops that we grew then we were like some fifty acres, forty-five acres in vegetables. But since I took over we have acquired more land and, some seasons we have raised a hundred and forty acres of different crops. Last year was the first time that we ever cropped sweet corn land twice with sweet corn and had a very good crop. We picked the first piece of corn in the last of June and then we picked the other one the last of September which a lot of people have never..., we thought we could do it but by irrigating and stuff we were able to have a good crop.

LL: When you say last year, you mean this past summer or a year ago?

DA: The year 1998.

LL: Okay.

DA: That was a good year, yep. '99 was an entirely different season.

LL: Oh, yeah.

DA: Terribly...awful lot of heat units gathered at once so it wasn't too favorable for the crops. We had scheduled them to come along in certain stages but they didn't come like that. They...certain ones...we're on the degree day system three, four years now, and the degree day system didn't seem to work like it should have.

LL: ---the degree day system?

DA: Well, it's called DD, it's heat units. We have a heat monitor when we're planting. After each so many heat units, we plant another piece of corn and some other crops the same way.

LL: What is...where are these calculations done? There's something out in the field that...

DA: Yes, we have a mach machine, a heat thing that we bought that takes air and soil temperature, both. And then we have to multiply the figures to come up with the right degrees and then from there we go after every fifty heat units. Say we plant another piece of corn to...so that when we start corn we usually pick com from June through October sometime. This year we picked corn from June into October, but it didn't work quite the same way as it has in the past. Oh, we have fields that we plant,...So we figure how many bags we're going to pick each day and this year it didn't work that way. The fields came closer together, so that we had too many bags to pick at certain times. So we had to leave some corn because, the market was not flooded, but the market prices wouldn't warrant us shipping it to a broker or something.

LL: When did you start using this monitor?

DA: I think this is the fifth season.

LL: And how did you happen to start...?

DA: Oh, it's something that's been around. We have this fellow from out in, I can't think of where he comes from. He sold us this and several people have tried it. They...the heat unit thing I guess started with the frozen food industry like Birdseye and some of these farms. They go by heat units and then they go in and harvest crops.

LL: So in other words, Birdseye for example, uses that with the groups that they contract with?

DA: Growers, but they work on the degree day system, so that they get more prime crops. And we found it worked well for us until this past season; but this past season was such a hectic season.

LL: With the...the drought? I mean, basically...

DA: Well, the drought and plus the heat factor. We had high humidity and temperature-wise along with it When we irrigated, some of the things that we irrigated came much faster than we anticipated. So it jammed things up so we really should have irrigated in rotation exactly like you planted. And so the farm wasn't planted that; way so sometimes you kind of mess yourself up a little bit.

LL: When did you know that you were going to into farming? When you were...like when you went to school, did you make...

DA: Well, when I was in high school I worked with my dad. Or actually from grammar school, my brother and I both did. Then I probably had decided when I was in high school that that's what I would like to do, I worked for my dad...from '55 to 1960s.

LL:

DA: And then...then I took over in '60 and he worked nine years for me.

LL: When...some people talked about difficulty working with their dads and the transition to when they could have responsibility for the farm. It sounds like yours...

DA: My father when he...when he retired he wasn't an easy person to deal with. He let me make the decisions, guided me; but yet he and I had similar thoughts so to speak. He was probably...he was my

banker for a number of years. I never had to go outside for banking purposes. and I worked much better than/my brother and he would never have worked the same way. He has a different little personality; he might try to move a little bit faster than I did or something. We went as far we could afford to go. In other words, I...well, most of the...the whole farm is owned outright right now. There is no mortgage on the place and my folks and I worked together on several projects. One or two pieces of property we bought and some changes. He...he wasn't as happy with me going into the retail, but once we got into it he realized that that's where the money is and probably should have done it earlier. We really swung retail in 1963. We did do some retail prior to that in the '50's but nothing to any extent.

LL: Where was your wholesale market? You mentioned...

DA: The wholesale market's in Hartford...

LL: And back then, was it there also?

DA: one time when I first went onto the truck it was...we were dealing direct with some of the chain stores. That became very difficult.

LL: Like which chain stores?

DA: First National, A&P and stuff. They became very dictatorial so to speak. We had to match a lot of prices from Jersey and other places in the country. Their minimum wages were less than Connecticut; so that was a terribly squeezing thing, price squeezes. And at one time, stores used to have specials Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays and then they changed it to Tuesdays through Saturdays or Sundays, and then they didn't take in deliveries on Mondays so you didn't have any day that they weren't on special, so to speak price-wise. But when we pulled out from the chain stores in 1963, I think it was, it was our last year, and we could see that there was a big difference as far as profit of margin.

LL: So and...when you dealt with the chain stores, did you deal with the market in Hartford at the same time.

DA: Yes.

LL: And what was that like then?

DA: Well, it was more competitive at that time because there was many more growers in the state at one time. There was a lot of small growers. Farms had fifteen to twenty acres, forty acres. There were several ones that specialized in certain commodities such as one or two specialized in endives and things like that, greens for the colored trades around Hartford and then there's some others that...that were in the root crop thing and then that became very, very competitive. And there is nobody left in that now.

LL: When you say root crops, what...?

DA: Oh, such as carrots and parsnips and things like that. They had a lot of probably the finest carrots in the whole United States were grown in the Hart...the Connecticut Valley.

LL: Carrots.

DA: Yeah. Thousands and thousands of bushels. There was probably ten...ten or twelve growers and there all out of it now. There's nobody growing carrots to that extent.

LL: Are those farms still there and growing something else ?

DA: Oh, some of the farms are still there but they changed and some farms have been broken up and gone retail, I mean houses. And there's other farms that they have sublet to some tobacco and other things like that. There's one or two that I think that are left that have some acreage that...but they're more aiming it towards the retail trade and they kind of wanted the roadside market and like some of the rest of us do.

LL: What were some of the commodities that you actually grew then? Did you say that one time you had tobacco here?

DA: Years ago, much before my time. When I was growing up, we probably grew a variety of things. Probably some twenty different items. Quite a bit of hand work was involved. We used to raise radishes and tomatoes and beans and squashes and pumpkins and all and a lot of winter squashes and cabbage and lot of lettuces and things like that.

LL: Celery?

DA: Yeah, we raised celery up 'til the Second World War which was the bleached celery. It was what they call pascal celery. It was all white but that went out by the wayside and there was one or two farms that did raise celery, but the green kind, in the Connecticut Valley up 'til, I would say, until the...maybe early '60's. I'm not sure.

LL: Did you ever do potatoes?

DA: We did used to raise a few; but potatoes became highly mechanized and we didn't have the acreage to warrant the big machinery so we phased out of it. We used to raise maybe a couple of acres of potatoes, mainly keepers...keeping potatoes for the winter like Green Mountains and things like...I think the last year we really grew anything was in late '60's. And then I got out of it. Right now...our two biggest crops are sweet corn, spinach; and we raise quite a few beets and radishes and string beans and squash family, all kinds, and cucumbers and pickles and stuff. So we're kind of headed it kind of more toward our own retail and supplying other retailers, independent retailers. Roadside supermarkets. They come here and they buy it, other crops beside sweet corn for me. They like, what do I have? Like I just had one in this morning picked up a bunch of beets and stuff.

LL: Now is there like a retail marketing association in...in the state? How do people know...now I realize you've been in the business a long time but if you've gone...before we started taping you talked about the percentage that was wholesale and retail. Would you repeat that and what you are...?

DA: Well, one time years ago we were in the '70's we were like forty per cent retail and sixty per cent wholesale. But then after I sold the other Clinton property on Route I which was thirty-eight miles from the home farm in the '80's, mid '80's, '85 to be exact, then we went like twenty per cent retail and to twenty-five per cent and the rest was wholesale. But then I've acquired many other independent retailers, orchards and people that don't have the acreage to raise sweet com and some of the crops that I raise. They are more suited for some of the berry crops and some of the of course, fruit trees. They do have other things that they grow, but not to the volume that we grow them; so that some of my planting schedule fits in with their sales marketing.

LL: So when you speak of a retail business, you are selling to retailers. Do you also have stands of your own?

DA: We have, one left, "---"Farm, stand.

LL: That's around here?

DA: Yep.

LL: And do you bring any of the berries and fruit crops in here to sell?

DA: Well, we have strawberries. I buy apples from a couple of the people that I deal with and buy other berries and raspberries and stuff from people. They have 'em and I don't, and they buy corn from me and so it's kind of a trade off thing.

LL: Why don't these retailers with roadside stands go to the wholesale market?

DA: Well, they do, but they want to come here to the farm because they want to pick it up fresh each day. Cause we start picking sometime after five in the morning and they're probably be coming in here between 7:30, 8 o'clock then start taking the merchandise out of here. We have a number of orchards throughout the state and a number of retailers that we deal with and we have...three or four from Glastonbury. We have one in Southington and one in Guilford and one in Branford that have been coming here. And we have Kensington, we have...some have been coming here since the mid '70's. So there's another that's '75, '76 and it's been more word of mouth that type of trade then. And we have one coming from Milford, and we have one from...coming from down at outside of New Haven. And they're coming to pick up stuff every day.

LL: So what do you think...so who are the...these customers because we have so many chain stores, now, and you're saying that's not one of the markets...

DA: Not where my merchandise goes. My merchandise goes primarily to independents.

LL: Yes.

DA: Direct.

LL: And what has brought them their customers? I mean, why would people be doing...the consumer...?

DA: They want more fresh product. The stuff is...they'll pick it up in the morning and of course, some things are picked the day before; but we refrigerate it and other things like sweet corn are not. We start picking at five and they have it on their stands at 9:00 in the morning.

LL: Do you think this is a...it sounds like there's been this kind of consumer for twenty years. But do you...but it seems like it's a growing market...

DA: Well, it's been a godsend for us because we can...we can head our crops and farm toward production. Now we know about how much to pick each day and we can govern our plantings and have things work out like. So we don't...aren't trying to deal with some of the wholesalers in Hartford that sometimes are tough on price. It depends on the seasons. Every season is different and I...I have had wholesalers in Hartford that are good buyers and stuff but of course, they have a different set of prices. They've got to make their markup and it makes a big difference.

LL: So if people do take it to Hartford, then Hartford kind of aggregates it for a variety of growers and then they are the middle man to sell it to the chains in quantity? Or do they ship it...?

DA: Well, yes and they sell to the independents too but...trying to get the highest quality merchandise to the consumers is the fastest way, and that's what we're doing right now. And most of the people that we deal with look for quality, not so much price conscious as wholesalers look for quality, but price...very price conscious.

LL: Okay.

DA: They put the squeeze on for the extra two dollars or whatever for just handling the product and then today sometimes you need the extra two dollars to...just to get...exist. You follow me? You're at the break point where the merchandise is got...you've got so much money tied up in the crop,...and this year was one of those years with irrigation...we put an awful lot of money into some crops to have them come out right. The price didn't show the difference over the year before. Well, price-wise, we probably didn't do as well on some of them because the price didn't change even though we had to pump a water and a lot of added expense. So you realize that the margin of profit is smaller. And of course, your irrigation equipment is not cheap and there's an awful lot of expenses as far as that...pumps and time setting up and moving and time to...to get the right amount of water on different pieces of ground. There's certain parts of the farm with much drier soil than others and we...you have to know your own farm. Up in the plains we had some that would have to pump an inch, inch and a half of water on them. But maybe in the meadow we could get away with same variety of corn, we could only have to pump three-quarters of an inch.

LL: Are there gauges though on the irrigation equipment or do you judge by water units? I mean, how do you know how much you're getting out there?

DA: Oh, the size tip nozzle and pounds pressure and we could figure out exactly how much we're pumping, or the volume of water that goes through the pump

LL: Are you on wells or city water?

DA: No...I have some city water but I don't use too much of it. I use primarily our own ponds. We have one in the meadow and we have one upland both. Our own pond was built big enough to take care of thirty-five acres with an inch and a half of water, it has capacity, storage capacity for that; but we're spring fed were one of the few fortunate things so we never can pump it dry. We can pump it down and overnight we might pump it down ten inches and it'll come back eight, nine inches overnight. When we shut down like at 8:00 o'clock and go at it at 6:00 in the morning. So the recovery rate is good, we're lucky on that.

LL: Would you talk about how your days are different, now, farming the vegetables than when they were over the last couple...I mean, you said you've been doing this for forty years, what were they like then and what are like now?

DA: Oh, it was an awful lot of small independent grocery stores when I first went into it and there was what they call, "house to house people." But now there are very few small grocery stores left and there's not many "house to house" people.

LL: And you delivered to them?

DA: They used to buy from us in Hartford but they...they used to be, I don't know, eight or ten. Now I don't think there's two on the house to house people that peddled, these trucks that go around.

LL: Oh, all right.

DA: They used to have like a fruit wagon or so or fruit truck or something and they'd go to this house and this house and so forth but I guess there's about two left in the whole city.

LL: So they come here and get their material...their food and they come...

DA: They used to get it in Hartford or they used to get it from here, yeah.

LL: But how has it...how have your days changed? Like when you were taking over from your father and working the farm?

DA: The biggest change occurred probably in 1963 when we got rid of the chain stores and went more independent and of course, we had some of our...some years they were difficult and other years that aren't. It depends on the...an awful lot on the products, say New England, New Jersey area how if it's dry or whether they're having a problem with bugs or insects or something else. That all has an effect on it. Outside marketing.

LL: How did you keep on what you needed to know about bugs?

DA: Well, through the University of Connecticut, Extension and we have all the New England Growers have a book that they give you. That they have every year with the new updates on chemicals and weed control and one thing another. And some of our seminars that we go to, they promote different things and we all...if you don't go, you get lost in the dust. You really got to go keep on things. You got to keep changing with the times. Oh, it's one of these things that I think you have to keep thinking forward and...and moving ahead it's kind of...you don't want to get stuck in a groove if you can help it and it's easy to do it. Now I..I think that one of your...maybe not as adventurous when you're in your sixty-plus as you were when you were in your forties and fifties. You're a little more, I don't know, not complacent but...but you still try to keep up with things. Like...I realize that there's...there's as many new varieties, we raise now is primarily all our SE corns.

LL: SE?

DA: Yes, the super sweets. They have the highest quality and the customers can keep them over a second day and they don't lose the sugar and...and customers have a much better product.

LL: And you get this seed from...?

DA: Not so much local. We do from...we buy from many different companies now. We buy from Liberty and we buy from Seedway and Harris.

LL: Where are these companies?

DA: Oh, Harris is out of New York and Seedway is out of Pennsylvania and Liberty is out of Ohio I think, at...yes, Philadelphia, Ohio I think it is. And then there's several others that we deal with some local growers...seeds companies like Hart Seed but not with the volume of seed that we buy. These other places we found them...

LL: I want to go back again to how you spent your days when you were taking over the farm. What did you have to accomplish in a day?

DA: What did I have to accomplish? Well, usually my day started sometime after four and that would be probably four to six-thirty in the market, Regional Hartford Market or delivering to when we had the chain stores. Now it's going into to Hartford Market with some merchandise for wholesale market and you then coming back and starting our day with...with our crews in the corn field, berry field or whatever we're picking...

LL: With your what in the field?

DA: Corn fields, berries, picking strawberries.

LL: With the crews though.

DA: Yes. Our help was there and then we'd get into our other commodities like spinach and beets and radishes we pick a little bit later in the day. And Squash and probably tomatoes and beans are one of the last things that we pick in the day.

LL: And did...did you and do you...did you at one time go out and pick with them?

DA: Yes, I still do, some.

LL: Okay, all right.

DA: Depends. If there's an awful lot of volume of stuff going out and we don't have a big...big crew then like Fridays and Saturdays when orders are heavy...sometimes you'll be with the help picking, harvesting. Not enjoy it as much as you did ten years ago, but you do it. I find that...that it makes my help work harder if I'm in the lot. I think they see me setting an example and they chug right along. They follow me, they know that we're pushing and they push right with me.

LL: Do you get the same crew back more than one year?

DA: Yes, we've been fortunate. We right now have had two of our migratory people have completed over ten years with us. One has been here I think four and the other one has been here seven out of the crew. I think it's seven. And then of course, my nephews have been here a number of years. They've probably been...they're both in their thirties, they probably been helping since they were teenagers, fourteen probably close to twenty years, both of them.

LL: Now the migratory workers, do they go on to other places, other crops or do they go back home?

DA: Oh, my migratory help go back home as a rule. They go from here to Jamaica.

LL: And they came from Jamaica, here? So they only come to do...

DA: Yes.

LL: So how many months are they here then?

DA: My longest man is here seven months this year. Came in April first and he left November the third.

LL: That's who you took to the airport the other day?

DA: And then we have other ones that come in a little later when we get busier with our harvesting and stuff. And we have...we have ones that come in May and June, stagger 'em so that as our work load increases, we get more help. Of course, we do sell a lot of spinach and stuff in the spring of the year and we keep our men busy with spinach and beet greens and bunching of radishes and picking squash and stuff like that. Harvest tomatoes, we started picking...we start picking those usually Memorial time within a couple of days when we start strawberries. Mostly the two of them together. So it creates quite a bit of more activity on the roadside market. People come for fresh strawberries and hot house tomatoes. In the meantime, we're already into some of the spinach and radishes and beets and other crops.

LL: How many trucks did it require when you were wholesaling more and then what kind of equip...other equipment do you have to help you in your business?

DA: Oh, we have two squares and two irrigation pumps and then we have six tractors. Well, actually seven and then we have...we have a number of trucks. We have I think it's eight trucks but they're not new. We use primarily / over the road. The rest of them are what we call "field trucks." They're older trucks and they're used to haul the merchandise from the field to the packing house. They don't usually go more than three miles. The farthest field is about three miles from the farm. It's about my extent of traveling during the day because the squares...

LL: How did you learn the mechanics...I understand that you help...you maintain your own trucks and things. How did you learn these skills?

DA: Well, we have one man that's retired that's a great friend of the family. He's been helping me since 1949 or 50 and he's much...he's older than I am, close to the eighty mark and I'm fortunate to have him. He works on a part-time basis and we work with him and he's helped us to learn a lot of different things.

LL: How old is your oldest truck?

DA: Oldest truck is 1934 which my father bought in '34. We have several '48's. Some in the '60's and some in the '80's. The tractors...the oldest tractor we have is I think '48 right now, '48 and we have two high clearance sprayers that we bought that we use primarily for spraying of corn and all our crops. They're built like on stilts so we're up high so we drive right over the top of the corn and we drive the material down into the whorls. We found that that type of spraying, you don't have to use as much material because we're putting the material where it does the best good, the best penetration.

LL: So those kinds of processes have changed too over the years?

DA: Yeah. We...we started in the high clearance squares back in 1958. Which was probably one the earlier ones that people could get into. We were fortunate we had one guy in town who was very, very forward thinking in that. Had a spray company and talked strongly at me when I was looking at 'em and he...he had a lot of different information from the University of Florida and trials. He would sell you anything, but he wanted to make sure that you knew that was other things out that might be more beneficial for your business and he was...he was very forward thinking. He was my dad's age. He was a very, very, very nice man and very conscientious. He would come and check and see how I'm making out and see if the materials are working and gave me some different people, independent people who sold spray materials that would treat me right and help me on in different materials if I, you know, if they knew something that might be better or something that was coming down the pike or something like that. Very, very good to me. I was fortunate to have some people good to work with and learn knowledge from. That's probably one of the key things. If you can pick up knowledge from other people and other

growers that have retired. There were several of them that were very good.

(Tape interruption.)

LL: ...prepare this. After it's picked from the fields and you bring it into the packing plant?

DA: Yes, grading room or whatever. We wash the merchandise and pack it according to our specifications. Of course, we grow what our customer count wants and what have you. Containers and bushels and boxes...

(End of side one.)

...everything is graded, sized. Quite a lot of it. We probably pride ourselves in being a leader in quality. High standards and quality. Quality control is our...one of our biggest things that has kind of make our business.

LL: And you train your help in this or do some of them know?

DA: Correct. I have trained some of my help for quality control. And they know when the quality isn't there, I'm not happy with it and they've got to do better. And we try to have the best or one of the best within the first three people in product-wise on most anything that comes off the...out of the farm. We've...that's one of our big key things here is...is quality control and that's why I don't think you want to get too much larger because you can't.. .sometimes you lose sight of quality for acreage and quantity and you can't manage it. You're expertise goes the other way. You get sloppy and then that means that you lose the top dollar on your merchandise. And I...I built it up so that I try to get the top dollar on most products in the state and I've tried to have one hundred per cent of a product being able to be sold that come off this farm.

LL: I was going to ask you, what do you do with those things that don't meet that standard?

DA: Some of them go right back into the ground. Sometimes we have a market for something that it's a market has a short supply throughout this New England area maybe there's a market for certain things but today that's very unlikely. Where products, if we don't have it good, we don't pick it.

LL: So there's no market...

DA: You go out and buy it so to speak or if a crop gets too mature or...or the crop is not the right size like squash and stuff, we...we don't even pack it. We just leave it and...we pick it and throw it down in the field.

LL: Is there any market for processing plants, canning plants and so on?

DA: Well, I never got involved with them. I...there was an outfit in...from Massachusetts that was in the pickle business. It went around here and tried that...to get some of us wrapped up with 'em but very hard you know, and they're... they're dealing on pounds, oh, by weight, price and everything else and sizing and I'm not sure that we could come out right. In other words, they...we might have the tonnage but we might not have the right size so then we would get the wrong prices and the combination wasn't...just didn't fit into my plan...planting and harvesting schedule very good. I just...I never did do anything with them. they came here two or three times and I guess a couple of people did go with them and there's a couple of 'em that aren't in business today either. They I think, found that they could produce but they couldn't keep the quality to get the highest money for them from the people you know, so I don't know. I'm glad I never got involved.

LL: How many farms like yours are there, do you think, in Connecticut?

DA: Hmm...that...I wouldn't be able to say so much. The town of Wethersfield there's only myself and...and one turf man to any size now and there's two small vegetable growers left. There's no more dairy cows in the town and there's no more other commodity farms, apple orchard or anything else in our town. But it appear, I would hard to venture to say how many that are doing actually. When I was first in it there was...must have been...there was probably fifteen or so of us that raised a lot of similar crops. Right now there's only two or three left out of that fifteen and I happen to be one of them. Those other people, the families have passed away or nobody carried on the business. Or the farms were sold for real estate or shopping centers or...and then some farms there was no...nobody in this generation. That there were no sons and son-in-laws or anything that wanted any part of it. And I think some of them realized how long the hours were, for a lot of them, and they just didn't want to get in that kind of a groove so to speak. 'Cause it's odd hours. In our growing season, sometimes from four o'clock in the morning 'til nine o'clock at night depending on what the season is and it's seven days a week so it's a...it's a very vigorous schedule from May through Halloween so to speak. There's other crops and other harvesting that takes place but they...that aren't on the same pressure schedule.

LL: I was going to ask you, what...what did you do for your leisure time?

DA: Leisure time. Laughter Well, I belong to the Fire Department and a few things like that and I at one time was quite active in the Jaycees in town and Young People's Farm Bureau. ASCS Commission I'm on now, Federal Land Bank's group. I'm on the board now. was on it back in the '70's but when it came in the '90's they asked me to go back on it so I figured it was my turn again. So, here I am for Hartford County back on it. You have to take your turn on some of these things. Otherwise, the people...they find it difficult to get these people to you know after a person does ten years and wants to get off he's entitled to it.

LL: Now you mentioned some organizations and I heard you say the Farm Bureau. What kind of connections with the Farm Bureau or the Grange? Did you do anything like that?

DA: Well, the Farm Bureau I was with the Young Adult and I went out west for several...couple of meetings. I went to Kansas and I went to Chicago and met with other young growers throughout the whole United States. Not only in vegetables but every commodity from peanuts to cotton to citrus fruit, the whole business that were on. Different family farms, corporations and some big wheat growers in the northwest, too, that were there. You realized that they have certain schedules like we did. And they had similar things. I guess you'd say some of those people have a little more rural lifestyle. Not as much city living as we do in New England area and in your hubbubs, you know, your big cities like Washington, D.C., Pennsylvania and things like that. Although I think a lot of them have a lot...have an awful lot of good basic things in their home. Their families is a big part of their lives, there. The family as a group per se. And there were...and probably the more you out the bigger Midwestern...I guess you would Slay, sometimes some of your religions run a big thing in the families. They do have time to go to church which some of us don't in our area. And they you know, you don't often think of people that teach Sunday School or something you know, and five or six or a thousand acres, you'd think they wouldn't have time to do all these things, but they do. And they have other ones that have two thousand acres that...that have time to...to do certain things the you would never think they would. You know, serve on the board of education and things like that and they take their part in the community. Not only their business but the...the whole thing so it makes it...makes it much closer knit.

LL: Do you remember anything about what your mother did while your dad was farming?

DA: Yeah, my mother was a school teacher. Came from a small town in Maine, a lumber town and then she came to Connecticut and she started teaching school and she taught school. Then she took off a few years when we were small and then she went back at it and retired. When...after I got out of school, she retired from the town of Newington. She took a Master's Degree in Latin and taught Latin the last nine years of her teaching career. So...and she was born and brought up with...in a town with a hundred, hundred and twenty-five population. And they had cousins and relatives you know, and what have you. And the lumber people, they're...they're part of agriculture too and they...they had that background in pulp and paper...paper products and stuff. So this...she was born out on that side...she was the oldest of four.

LL: Who was your support system. You've managed this farm and run it on your own. This is the Fire Station, the emergency?

DA: Noontime.

LL: Oh, all right. Who did you...as you managed this after..after your dad, who did you manage it with? I mean, how did you....most...most people have a support system of some kind. Like either a family. You were a bachelor, all right. What do you think...

DA: My mother outlived my father quite a bit. She was always here. She...she helped a lot. She used to do a lot of things that... well, she outlived my father I think eighteen years. She lived to be ninety and eight months. He lived to be seventy-six and she...but she was five years younger than he; so she lived to I think, nineteen years more. She was here and she worked with us and when we first opened up retail she helped on the retail stand and she knew a lot of different people and people from our church and different organizations that she belonged to. She was a great help as far as seeing things were done. She was very easy to deal with, she and I. We had a good communication. Both my parents I had a good communication with, more so than a lot of people. We were probably more like brothers and sisters than parents and son, so to speak. I...I think back lots of time to say they're very supportive of whatever I wanted to do they would go along with it within reason. But most...ninety-seven per cent of the time they would...they'd back you a hundred per cent. So I was fortunate in that respect.

LL: I want to change something in my notes here. The kinds of vegetables that you grew...I've been talking to some people and they've talked about how the tomatoes have changed or how the squash had changed or how, because of breeding, if you will, the different kinds of tomatoes that now need to be shipped distances and so they're thicker skinned and they're more square and they can be packed and sent and shipped. Are there other instances...?

DA: There's other things that have changed too. But they have done a lot of work in breeding so that they've had higher quality seeds. So...and some of our special fertilizer mixes that we use, we have been on a specialized fertilizer program since back in 1976. Dick Ashley and I started experimenting with them and now we find out that the...we were probably twenty years ahead of our schedule because we don't have the runoff problems with the nitrogen and stuff. We were putting on exactly what nutrients we needed to raise certain crops, pounds and what have you. We went into it in '76 and now they are in the '90's and '96 and 5 with more preaching it now because of the leaching and stuff like that so...and we had...and a lot of varieties have been bettered...better varieties. You have to know where to get them, different seed companies. There's certain ones that...like Asgrower kind of features some of the spinaches and Harris has some very good beet seeds and stuff like that that have a better...nicer top and more uniform bottoms and what have you. Then we have to get used to some of our different seeding...seeders and stuff so we know what we're doing. You know what I'm saying. And then the SE corns have played a tremendous part in the sweet com industry. It's a quality and production, bags per acre. Some of them we have done really well in certain varieties. Over the years that they've certainly done a lot of work in that

field to help the growers. The only thing we're finding is the seed cost of some of these things have gone up a lot. Some seed cost and stuff has probably tripled since oh, the early '80's.

LL: And you can't...and you can't re...

DA: ...the beginning farm spends five thousand today they're probably spending closer to fifteen thousand dollars for seed and stuff like that.

LL: And because they're...they're hybrids you can't use the seeds.

DA: No, but they're much...much more uniform. Much more size...sized out and much easier for our new type planters that are drop one seed at a time and that have belts in them and things like that and some of the seeds, small seeds now sized much better. It makes it much easier to plant to have the proper calculation for square foot as you should. And a lots of times you have to do a little experimenting. Maybe the first two plantings aren't as good as the third and fourth but you try to improve yourself. I do a lot of small seeds myself. Some of it, I look at the seed and then I see what the germination is and what have you and between the two, I'm usually always coming out with a seeder that I have to regulate what I'm doing. In other words, it's you drop so many seeds per square inch, you can't have it too thick. And otherwise you don't have the size of the bloom that you want or the bottom on the beets or whatever.

LL: What's brought you...what's been...what's brought you the greatest satisfaction in your working this farm?

DA: What's the first best thing. To be within the first two or three top growers in the state. Chuckle. There's some satisfaction to it. yes. And we try to be in one of the leaders in the state. We have always...Dick Ashle was a I think, we've always tried to have the...one of the better products and it's nice to have the products to be one of the best in New England, even. Not only in the State. We try to raise some stuff that not many people can raise, any better you know. With my help now, I got 'em trained so that they know exactly the standard which I require.

LL: Are there any competitions like there used be years ago where you have a chance to show your products and compete...?

DA: Oh, I guess there is some in some of the Granges but we don't happen to have one in this town but there's some judging contests in some of these more rural communities I guess. I have never gotten involved with it but I do know that there... I understand they have some kind of things that some of them...big pumpkins and different sizes and different things and what...

LL: What's been your greatest frustration?

DA: I don't know. It's hard to know. Chuckle.

LL: Different ways on different days?

DA: Well, I...well, it depends on the pressure. The worse thing is...is not to have enough time to do everything you have to do. That's the worse part. That's the thing. Sometimes you just can't get everything done that you think you should be doing. That's my problem. I guess a lot of people's that you always have more work than you complete in one day. You try to do it all. You got it all scheduled out but sometimes maybe you get only eighty-five per cent done today and then you got that fifteen per cent on the next day and you try to keep up with everything. Yep.

LL: What do you think is going to be the future of this farm?

DA: My farm? Well, it's hard to tell. I'm hoped sometime maybe one of my nephews might want to take it over but...

(Tape interruption.)

LL: If you're going to give any suggestions to the Commissioner of Agriculture about the status of agriculture in Connecticut, what would...what would it be?

DA: There's probably a big market for agricultural products in this state if we could keep a certain percentage of acreage open. More of that will be beneficial because they'll have the best product there is for the public. So I think that this a big key thing that you keep some acreage open and in production, we're going to...we won't be limited to shipped-in products which sometimes aren't as good as the fresh market products. And I think there's a certain percentage of younger people that might like to go into it, to keep it going.

LL: I've talked to people who are...who have either sold their development rights so that they can sell the farm as farming. I've talked to people who have set up trusts to keep it in the family. I've talked to people who have...are selling lots for...as their pension because they...they need to. And I've talked to people who are looking at the DEP open space regulations. I've talked to people who are worried about eminent domain so I...it was a whole variety of people who are concerned about issues of land use. What has been happening in Wethersfield?

DA: Nothing as far as open space as far as I know. That 490 Act itself has got some of us to hold on. So that we're taxed for when it's used not what it's potential is. The other thing is like I say...oh...I'm kind of at a loss for words right at the moment.

LL: That's all right.

DA: The having it put into trust and things like that for tax reasons is probably one of the savers as far as agriculture is concerned. Another thing is inherit aretay and stuff like that you can upset the whole apple cart. The passing it from generation to generation this is true. This is one of the big things that can upset a lot of these big farms or small farms even to when they're highly valuable locations. 'Cause the court systems don't always take in consideration certain things. They have their set rules or figures and so it can pretty near demolish certain working capital on some of the farms just to pay back. I know of occasions where it has almost wiped out certain places. They've had to start almost from scratch again. They held the farm but they've lost all their working capital and they had to go out and refinance and sometimes that's not easy to do at certain ages. Depending on the age of the people. And then there's the trust. There's a beneficial to them. I realize that.

LL: Well, I've come across so many different kinds of examples at...yeah. Anything else you'd like to add?

DA: No. Can't think of anything.

LL: Well, thank you very, very much for taking the time.

(End of Interview)