

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

Interviewer: Luane J. Lange, CANR, Extension

Name of Person Interviewed: Shirley Ferris, Interview #2

Date of Interview: April 8, 2003

Draft #: R-1 January 27, 2020

Transcriber: Charter Oak Scanning, Adam Smith, Machine

Contract Firm: Charter Oak Scanning

Interviewee Address:

SF: We hadn't come to a compromise, and I'm thinking it's like about 8:00 at night and we kept going at it. At midnight, we sent out the people. I had Hawaiian people that would come out, very good. At 1:00, we thought we had an agreement. We finally had something that made everybody happy. This was after months and months of phone conversations and special conferences and all of that. Next morning, we had to vote. The guy from Louisiana, his [Unintelligible]. I said, "You don't give a whiff about dairy. You make sure there's X amount of dollars in there for cotton and if you put it in there for cotton, now [Unintelligible]." So we don't have it, so more meetings and more meetings and more meetings, and we finally came up with something that fit dairy into the [Unintelligible] of the program. Of course, those of us from the northeast really wanted to compact anyone. So we were willing to give a little bit on this dairy difficulty because we really thought we could get the compact, and we had – I think 25 states at that point either had state legislation for the compacts or were on the verge of having them. Some states meet every other year, so – but then as it went along, our proposal got agreed on and we sent it up to the house, but the compact, I'm not going to blame it on Jeffry. Who knows? I'm not sure, I think Jeffry's got blame. It was easy to point a finger on Jeffry's for something that I don't think the administration was ever going to do in the first place. That's my personal opinion which [Unintelligible].

LL: I can hold this tape for a couple years. [Laughter]

SF: But the end result was that it became clear that we weren't going to get the compact reinstated. There's a lot of thought and I think I agree with it that we tried to expand too fast, that we should not have tried to do the whole eastern side and some states out west and all that. I have in here somewhere a letter that I wrote to a fellow named Richard McKee who at that time – I don't know if he still is – was the head guy in USDA's dairy division, and the time that I talked to him, I set a meeting a Washington and I

managed to get a hold of him and we talked about it. It was at that time period when we were crunching up – was it 33 milk bucket orders down to 11? I believe that’s what it was, 36 to 11, something like that. I said, “You know what? You’re changing the amount of milk market orders you have,” and the milk market orders are based on here’s where the milk is produced and here is the market where it’s going, so the market [Unintelligible]. “So now you have 11 milk market orders across the country. Why don’t we do those same boundaries and make a compact within each one of those?” He says to me – not in writing, but orally he says to me, “That’s an excellent idea, and that’s good common sense.” That’s why he’s never going to go anywhere. [Laughter] Well, I wrote him a letter anyhow and he wrote back [Unintelligible], but anyway, I kept talking about it, and remember when I talked about sometimes we need to get your idea to a stronger voice? [Unintelligible] last spring, Nathan Rogers from New York who’s got a very strong voice, he’s a young man, a wonderful commissioner, is starting to talk about it, but he’s only talking about the milk market only for this area. The only problem with that is the New England area goes down to New Jersey, Delaware, and then it comes up and splits Pennsylvania and Newark in half, and compacts generally are for the whole state. So if we do that, then maybe we have to go over here and include all of Pennsylvania and Ohio, and I just read yesterday there’s some senator from Pennsylvania who’s got a new compact [Unintelligible], and maybe he’s talking about the whole – maybe they’re putting two compacts together or something like that. But I still think compacts is the right way to go. The MILC – and I just learned the other day what that stands for. It’s milk income loss contract program. It’s still on the compact, it’s an [Unintelligible] price. When the market falls below \$16.94, in this case, the government will kick in and they comp the difference. Do you know about the controversy in terms of the largest farms don’t like it because of the cap and all that stuff? Out west they don’t like it because their view is that it’s keeping all those little farmers going and making this surplus. [Unintelligible] he says, “Where’s the milk coming from?” It’s coming from New Mexico, Idaho and California. Those states, their production has increased [Unintelligible] over in Wisconsin, in New England and [Unintelligible]. So I think that school of thought maybe that we tried to build too far too fast, that might be right. The philosophy behind that move was more votes, and to the politicians, more votes is the answer. I think maybe if we do it again, we should just speak to our area and not speak to the whole country, let other guys worry about their areas and community instead of a huge states ratification thing, but that concept of we need the vote, that’s the important concept. But what’s interesting to me as the compact has unfolded is that there’s Senator Schumer – he’s from Manhattan – who’s very much in favor of the compact. There’s a new congressman who’s very much in favor, and he’s from the Bronx. The inner city people, [Unintelligible]. They try to say the compact is going to cost you more. No, I mean we proved it. The compact has won every single lawsuit. Now, there’re farmers who are beginning to say to me – [Unintelligible] – “I think I like the MILC program better than the compact because by the time you got finished taking out [Unintelligible] people and all that kind of stuff, the utilization rate and all that is down anyway.” The thing that I don’t like about it is that it’s a government program. It’s not coming out of the market. I feel strongly that if you want something, you should go buy it. I get very upset when people don’t like that a piece of pasture is being developed. Well, I don’t like it either, but if you don’t want that piece of private property developed, go buy it. You can’t tell someone else what to do with their property. The compact came out of the market and we protected people who were of low income. They were protected, they didn’t have to sell – the thing that some people say is good about the MILC program too is that because it’s a federal program, it’s something that a politician can do for you and then come back and say, “See what I did for you?” If they raise the tax, that money’s going to be gone in six seconds, and I know that there’re a lot of the larger farms who are very unhappy with me because I wouldn’t go along with the notion that they either remove the cap or that every family member in the farm should have their own cap. They might [Unintelligible] and it never was intended for the big farms. It was always intended for the small farms. It was always that balance of keeping rural farms throughout the country, and by the way, that’s 80% throughout the country and that’s 98% in Connecticut. That’s 99% of the farmers in Vermont, so to change it in national agriculture, we’re talking about diversification.

LL: Right.

SF: You could see the way conversations went around certain programs and the support. Let's talk about [Unintelligible] partners a bit. We got in league with California, Texas and Florida to get this special cross-brand program that would – the funding that they had for all the radio ads and things – that's where that money came from – was especially called a grant, plain money, no match, and when I heard that I was like, "Whoa." Connecticut was going to get I think \$680,000.00 or something like that. It's based on the cash received from those states. Unfortunately, in our state, there are certain segments of our industry that will not make public what their income is and so we have problems with that, but I'll take what I can get. \$680,000.00 is a whole lot more than I have to play with. At the same time, the green industry and [Unintelligible] and others were pushing to upgrade the Connecticut Grown program, and so the talk was about \$1 million. Where are we going to get \$1 million? So I brought the marketing people together and I said, "Okay, think fast. What did you ever want your whole lives? Make a list. Prioritize it for me because I'm going to be going to these meetings and I got to blah, blah, blah." Well, they whacked – the \$1 million went down to \$200,000.00 or \$300,000.00 or something, and then of my \$680,000.00, the next thing was, "Yes, you're definitely going to get \$680,000.00." Okay, where's it going to go to? Is it going to go to my agency or is it going to go in the general fund? Because if it goes in the general fund, I'm never going to see it. So I made a lot of noise about that and I guess some other commissions did too, so it ended up – it was going to come through the Department of Agriculture, but it was going to come through [OPM]. Great. So I called OPM and I said, "Can I have my money?" They didn't even know it was coming. [Laughter] But anyway, the word came through as "Yes, your \$680,000.00 is coming to the agency, but we need a savings of..." I think it was \$300,000.00 or something from our budget. "So we're going to take \$325,000.00 from the \$680,000.00. Is that okay with you?" Well, what am I going to say? I can't take it out of my budget. Alright, there it was, and "You know what? The [Unintelligible] station wants to do this deer depopulation thing or whatever it is and they need X amount of dollars and we don't have it and they don't have it, so we're going to take that out of your \$680,000.00. Is that okay with you?" [Laughter] So it boiled down to we ended up only with like \$300,000.00 and something.

LL: But it was more than you had before. [Laughter]

SF: \$325,000.00 is a whole lot more than \$15,000.00 which is what I had the year before. [Laughter] So then the word was – that was like in August and the fiscal year's actually [Unintelligible], so by the end of September, it had to be spent. So first you had no money, and now you got to run out and spend it. But do we have to actually spend it? Because in state government, you can't pay for something you don't have yet.

LL: So you just allocate it because it'd be...

SF: Yes, so [Unintelligible], but yes, you could. Then it was, "Well, you know what? We'd like to save some for next year's Ag Expo. Can we save it ahead if we have a contract?" So it ended up with a big pile of it. I think it was \$50,000.00, but I don't know exactly now that went to the Ag Expo. Knowing that now, remember, we went from the Armory. Remember, September 11, it got issued out for the military, so Ag Expo for 2001 never happened because Armory got issued out, September 11, for military use and there was just no way we could find another place. I'd already been saying we were off to something like 10,000 or something at the Armory, and I remember standing there one day and saying to myself, "If there's a fire, how are we going to get 10,000 people out of this building? Yes, there're exits, but there're all these booths in the way." So I said to Bob, start thinking about a new place, but I want to stay in Hartford," because to me, it was very important to stay in the capital city. I know [Al Cones] and some others thought it ought to go around the state and I said, "No, it's got to stay in the

capital.” So they went back and they came back and the only other place was the XL Center. Have you seen the size of that thing?

LL: No. In fact, I don't even know where it is.

SF: It's out off 91.

LL: Really?

SF: Yes.

LL: I put 35 or something like that.

SF: It's really [Unintelligible].

LL: But I began seeing advertising and thinking, “What is it?”

SF: We've got the home shows there, boat shows there, flower shows there.

LL: How long has it – I've never noticed it before until this year.

SF: Four or five years, I guess.

LL: But you could've made it if you can fill the [Unintelligible].

SF: It's like four or five times the size of the Armory. So Bob's saying the only other place is the XL Center. No, come on. [Laughter] The staff was like, “You got to talk her out of that one, Bob.” [Laughter] I said, “No, [Unintelligible].” So when they canceled the Armory, I said, “Okay, we got a whole year. Figure out what you're going to put in there.” Those guys, they probably felt glad. I'm glad. [Laughter] Anyway, we went over and we got – I said, “Try to get the same weekend.” We couldn't do it the same weekend. We had to do it in the first part of October and that was [Unintelligible] fair or some kind of thing, but it's the only one time we could get. We were able, for the first time, to not have to beg and borrow. We didn't have to beg everybody. People had to pay for the booths, but we didn't have to beg the grocery chain and all that for money and we won't have to this year either. We have the money in place and we have the contract with the outfit and I said, “Please try to do the Ag Expo.” I sat down with the deputy one day, the acting commissioner, and I said, “There're like two or three things that are like dear to my heart. See if you can keep those things.” So yes, I think he's very sincere. He's willing to try and he thinks we've done some good things [Unintelligible], but at any rate, 15,000 went to Ag Expo and there was I think around 50,000 or so that went to the radio campaigns and that was fun, [Unintelligible] the various stations. The guy from little, tiny Brookfield came up with the slogan “Connecticut Grown: A Short Trip from the Farm to Your Home,” and I said, “Have you got that patented?” “No.” “Good, then use it.” So that's our tag or our line. Then Brad Davis was interested in doing an interview, so every first Monday morning of the month, I was on the Brad Davis show. The group down in Brookfield, most of them, it was a tagline and they're only going to use my voice with that tagline and make it go [Unintelligible], but Brookfield wanted a whole thing [Unintelligible] with my voice, so the marketing guy dreamed up this campaign where it came with the [Unintelligible] and there was a woman there that was like the [Unintelligible] and he was like, “Boy, this maple syrup is good. It's probably from Vermont or something like that.” She said, “Vermont? No, it's from Connecticut.” “Oh, Connecticut,” that kind of thing, and then I'd come in with all the [Unintelligible]. We changed it according to the season, so maple syrup and then [Unintelligible] six packs for your garden and on through the season [Unintelligible]. That was a lot of fun and a whole bunch of money went into that and we got two years.

Second year, a couple of stations dropped, so we moved our money and we learned that a smaller, local station is better [Unintelligible]. So I went travelling around for a year doing all these little interviews with people. It was quite fun and it got people interested and [Unintelligible] all this kind of stuff, and what the radio people kept saying to me, “You’re so personable over the mic.” That took care of it, we got the special. To get a good interview, you [Unintelligible] and if you know your material, then you – so it went mostly to radio, went to Ag Expo, and then I’ve always had this little beef with Connecticut Grown in that there’s absolutely no [Unintelligible] and I said, “We got to get a piece of this specialty crop thing to the dairy farm. I mean there’re all those guys out there and they look to me to do something for dairy farming.” So I gave a challenge to the chairman and I said, “Tell me something, \$20,000.00, \$30,000.00, \$40,000.00 at the most, that we could put this money to use that would help dairy farming.” So he came back with [Unintelligible]. “Let’s go out and test some [Unintelligible], and then if we got anything to say, we’ll go to farmer’s industry, what do they want to do about it?” There’s probably not more money coming, but now maybe they – and what the survey said to me was there’s not enough [Unintelligible] who worry about it. The only people that are going to worry about it, and most of the farmers in the state, that 98% of the [Unintelligible], probably 98% of the 98% raise their own animals so they’re not bringing in disease, so they don’t probably have to worry. The ones that might have a concern are the guys that raise animals to sell as breeders.

LL: For the tape, spell out for me [Unintelligible].

SF: J-O-H-N-E-S. So we did our survey, we found that there was very little [Unintelligible] in the state. However, nationwide, they [Unintelligible] they’re continuing on. There was enough money to fund the survey, to fund the educational program, I think two seminars, and then after that, we were going to see what we can do. Now, in the meantime, California’s working really hard to get this specialty product reinstated, and last I knew, it had not been. It did not make its way into the [Unintelligible], unfortunately. That would’ve been great. The problem with Connecticut and a lot of states is if it’s a matching grant, we can’t come up with a match.

LL: Yes. Well, that [Crosstalk].

SF: That’s when [Crosstalk]. First they said it had to be for special crops, then it can only be for this. Finally, [Unintelligible] said, “You know, if you want to...” Then September 11 came on the scene and also the business in England with the disease.

LL: Oh, Mad Cow.

SF: Mad Cow Disease. If you wanted to take some of that money and use it for research or a disease program or something, then you could do that too, so that’s how we could put [Unintelligible].

LL: Did you ever find that there were any hidden agendas that you – like, you talked about how you read something and you heard rumblings about things and so on. You heard rumblings because you were very intuitive or did people talk to you? Or did people ever surprise you with something that you didn’t know was about to happen or going on?

SF: I think it was – it’s kind of like if I hear a rumor, I don’t pay attention to it, but if I hear the same rumor three times and I get it from different places, now I’m trying to pay attention. So I think it probably was more like you hear it here and then you hear it there, maybe there were trends developing. That probably was it more than anything else, and probably, it’s sort of an innate suspicion of [Unintelligible]. [Laughter] The whole idea of favors, I don’t like people doing me favors or something I got to pay back. It just bothers me that there’s this – compromise is a good thing most of the time, but it seems to me that in politics, you really end up doing something because it’s politically astute, not because

it's the right thing to do, and sometimes it turns out good, it turns out better, but I think you lose more than you gain when you do that kind of thing. So do people surprise me? I don't think so. It can't be called being surprised.

LL: As you went into this, how has it changed you? Did it change you at all, this experience?

SF: Well, when I said I was going to leave, it was [Unintelligible] and I said to my husband, "I have run a \$4 million budget with 72 employees for eight years. I don't know if I'm going to be able to just be somebody's wife or mother." That line of thinking I think is what started me thinking about the ice cream shop, and I said "If I'm going to do it, I'm going to do it. I'm going to put the hours, I'm going to decide this now, and if you can live with that, then we'll be okay." He's fine with it. I think it's imperative that we on this farm do something [Unintelligible]. We have 7,000 to 8,000 people drive past the farm every day. We're dumb if we don't do something. We talked about this and that and my husband [Unintelligible]. So we decided we wanted to stay in the farm, we wanted to stay together as a family. We wanted to do something in dairy and we all realized that somebody's got to do the retail thing none of us are sure we want to be in charge of. "You can do that, mom." [Laughter] So that's kind of the way we started out, but I have to tell you, I have – and people were worried about me, the transition. My two daughters were especially concerned; they were talking back and forth on the phone about "How's mom doing? Is she depressed?" [Laughter] [Unintelligible] I really enjoy not having to – and as I've been putting this scrapbook together, I have a couple of pages up here, examples of having to work with staff who [Unintelligible]whack them. "I'm your mother," I'd whack them a couple of times, and I'm really glad not to do that anymore and I'm really glad not to do the commute anymore, but I miss the people. Really, I miss Faith terribly. It's hard to get up in the morning and not know [Unintelligible], but she already resigned anyway.

LL: Oh.

SF: Yes, she retired in December anyhow, so she wouldn't be there if I was still there. I think there're like better things that kind of "Okay, time to go home now." Number one, Faith is gone. Number two, [Unintelligible] about bringing up the agency again. I don't think I can get through that again.

LL: I was going to say, do you have any thoughts about how that's going to go? This is very different every other time. I used to think – wasn't it [Unintelligible] that introduced the bill to break up the agency and to put it someplace else?

SF: Well, he wanted a Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources. His idea was [Unintelligible] the department and bring the forestry into it which is something different. But this now is another thing that they're talking – I believe what the governor's budget calls for is for the Department of Agriculture to move lock, stock and barrel over to Consumer Protection. There would be a division of agriculture, there would be a commissioner of agriculture that would be under Consumer Protection.

LL: Does this model exist any place else?

SF: I don't think so. There're divisions of agriculture in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, but they're [Unintelligible]. I think that would be a horrible, horrible thing to do [Unintelligible]. When it came time to talk about whether Mitch was going to come back and the governor was trying to bring him in, we all got to sit down and talked with the other governor,[Unintelligible]. The last time I around I talked with the governor and I had my business plan. The agency has a business plan for the first time ever. I brought my business plan and I said, "We've got this done, but I don't have this done yet and I want to do this." This time, my visit with him [Unintelligible] and he said, "The governor's talking about merging

the agency. How do you feel about that? Would you be supportive?" I said no. He said, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yes," and as it's coming out of my mouth, I'm thinking, "This one's going to go [Unintelligible]." [Laughter] But I think in hindsight, when I look back at it, I was a bit disenchanting in it. But Faith came to me about June of last year and she said, "I'm due for retirement now. I've had my years and I'm ready to go." I said, "Well, could you at least stay until the end of my term?" So she said, "Alright, I'll stay there for six months. I'll keep [Unintelligible] whatever it is," because there's a time of six months [Unintelligible]. Then the plan was to, in January, train someone else to step in for her spot, but they eliminated her position. "Okay," and they're also saying no more deputies. "Okay, I'm going to run it without a deputy and without a secretary."

LL: You didn't have a deputy for a while either.

SF: Right, but I had Faith and I [Unintelligible]. Then we had to travel, [Unintelligible] vacations. I had worked very hard, in my own quiet kind of way, to work my way into USDA, and last January, there was a – I belong to this group called Women Executives in State Governments. It's people who are either elected or appointed to executive positions, so women across the country. Their conference is held every year in Washington – one of the conferences is in Washington every year. They generally coincide with my [Unintelligible]. So I was planning on going a day or two early, go to the conference and then go to USDA. The deputy secretary had come to Connecticut and we just hit it off, and he said, "Come down to the department sometime and I will personally give you a tour anywhere you want to go, whoever you want to meet." So I was lining up – "Okay, I'd like to talk to agriculture in person," I'm lining up people to talk to and had it all arranged. I don't think he bought tickets. I think he had bought me plane tickets. I paid for all and any travel I ever did as a commissioner out of my own pocket. I probably spent \$20,000.00, \$30,000.00 out of my own pocket while I was commissioner. Anyway, then the word came, "You can't go to this conference. You can't go to that one." I said, "Why?" "Well, because there's a perception that our commissioner will [Unintelligible]." I said, "This is a conference and we're going to do this, and then I'm going to NASDA and I'm going to do that, and then on top of that, I've got to..." "You can't go." "You know I always pay my own way." "That's not the problem. You should be in Connecticut, at your desk." I said, "But I'm doing the state's business." "You can't go, unless you want to take vacation time and pay your own way." So I thought about that for a while and I said, "Well, I'm done paying my own way and I'm not going to take personal time to – I'm doing [Unintelligible]." So I got really angry and I think I began to get disenfranchised right there, and then there were a couple other things. Charlie said to me one day, "There's no way you're talking yourself out of this." [Laughter] One time I said, "Okay, [Unintelligible] for you. I've done everything I want to do." After a while, I don't know if it's burnout, I don't know what it was, but I just said, "I'm not going to play the game, I don't care anymore. I'm not going to be supportive of something I can't be supportive of, and I just won't play the game anymore so I'm going home." [Laughter] But by the time when I was commissioner and trying to send out [Unintelligible], I was disallowed to say I do not support the breaking of the agency. I was allowed to say if the legislature decides that they're going to move to do that, then they shouldn't move the whole [Unintelligible]. So it goes out with the commissioner [Unintelligible], but that's what they said the first time too and I respect that. So it just was like about six or seven things of "You know what? I don't want to do this anymore. I don't want to do this anymore." The ice cream shop, a year of coming home and being home and [Unintelligible] and being with the family again and all that. It was just overpowering and I said, "I don't want to [Unintelligible]. Then they talked about reconstruction and a lot of [Unintelligible], and it takes forever to get across to the [Unintelligible]. [Laughter]"

LL: Get a helicopter. [Laughter]

SF: "Forget it, I ain't doing that no more." [Laughter]

LL: You had great satisfaction with some of the things you've done, but if you had to name one thing that you remember that brought you the greatest satisfaction [Unintelligible], is there anything?

SF: Probably getting the [Unintelligible] to agree to put together a business plan regionally. That took a lot of human resources work, and the ag cluster - it's hard to say which one of those was more - the ag clusters period, when they first started talking about the cluster thing, agriculture was going to be a cluster. Then they decided, "You've got a department, you don't need that."

LL: Is that with education, the clusters?

SF: No, the Connecticut Agricultural Businesses Cluster.

LL: But isn't that also built on [Unintelligible] and education to cluster things a certain way?

SF: No.

LL: No? Okay, go ahead.

SF: Now, the clusters are built on [Unintelligible]. It's more...

LL: The business and industry and commerce.

SF: Yes, it's more commercial things. Well, I'll explain to you the clusters we have now. We have an aerospace cluster, all of the people that make [Unintelligible] for airplanes. We have a plastics cluster, all the people that are involved in plastics. We have a tourism cluster. We have a biotech cluster, a bioscience cluster.

LL: So I think in education they were trying to kind of dovetail these clusters.

SF: I don't know. This is something that's not [Unintelligible].

LL: No, it's not.

SF: But it's really somebody tells you, you can't do something you want to do. So I kept saying, "But agriculture is part of the future of this state. It shouldn't be part of the economic policy of the state." Then I read somewhere once that if you take [Unintelligible] figures about what our gross state product is and then you take USDA's figures about what the value of agriculture [Unintelligible] is, it's 2% of the economy. I read in Texas, agriculture in Texas is 1% of their local economy and I go, "Well, holy shit, somebody needs to know this." [Laughter] So I started talking to Jim [Unintelligible]. Jim [Unintelligible] is head of economic development and is also on the board of trustees. So I was making a point of [Unintelligible] to have lunch and to talk, and he said, "What you need is a champion because you can't do it. The cluster's not about government, the cluster's about businesses. You need a business champion." Then I go, "Alright, who should I..." Then a little while after that, John Lyman of Lyman Orchards gave a talk...

LL: I interviewed his father.

SF: ...at the Science Day, at the [Unintelligible] and I got my champion. We happened to be in a meeting together a little while after that and gave him the idea and said, "What do you think?" He said, "Why don't we talk about it?" So we had a conversation and he said, "Why don't we bring in [Unintelligible]?" We sat down and we said, "What do you think? Is this something that we ought to go

forward with?" They said [Unintelligible]. Well, I went by myself once, in fact, and I talked to this guy named Austin who was economic development [Unintelligible] and they said, "You got a champion, it sounds like. We could look into it, but we don't want to [Unintelligible]." So the group, the four of us, then John's our champion, then John and I went and we talked to the [Unintelligible] and they went, "We'll think about it." So we invited him to a governor's meeting and [Unintelligible] sometimes they don't, but at that meeting, [unintelligible] and they came because they were going to talk about the H2O [Unintelligible] program. So economic development said, "Whoa," because we had our own [Unintelligible] people and we had each one say, "I'm Joe Schmo and this is what I do on the farm," and it's like, "Whoa, I didn't realize that there was that many, and two, that their gross income was that much, that the amount was this much." I mean [Unintelligible], so they said, "Well, I guess it sounds like it's something we should go forward with." So then they gave us – I believe it was \$40,000.00. Economic development transported our budget, \$40,000.00, to be spent on a consultant who took us through a strategic plan toward a cluster, and throughout the plan, there were three go/no-go and we did each – we went and had [Unintelligible] the go/no-go and we took their report to us, what they heard, how we were thinking about going here. We took that report and we [Unintelligible] it and turned it into a proposal for [Unintelligible] for \$100,000.00, and that was our first year funding and our deliverables were we would have, by the end of the year, 20 members, we would raise \$100,000.00 and then \$200,000.00, and then a bunch of other stuff. So we just now sent in a proposal for another \$100,000.00 because we got 19 members [Unintelligible], we have our business thing, we incorporated, we have our board of directors and all those good things, and we have our executive director which we fired in [Unintelligible] and all's looking good. So I don't know whether they're going to [Unintelligible] that \$100,000.00 or not. The reason why we sent the guy that we have now going is because he's too far ahead of us. He's a visionary. I got to go out and [Unintelligible] and get members and the thing that we need more in [Unintelligible] now is we need members so that there're dues coming from the farmers.

This guy was an associate member, [Unintelligible], and that's fine, but when [Unintelligible] and we lost Joe Schmo's farm down in [Unintelligible]. So that's what I was [Unintelligible]. We had a new guy who has been a member of the board and has represented one of the larger funds in the state who's no longer employed by them because [Unintelligible]. He's a very down-to-earth kind of guy, very unique kind of guy and I think he's going to be good. I'm hoping we'll get at least some of that \$100,000.00. I know that the cluster program has been [Unintelligible], so the money is there whether they choose to send it our way or [Unintelligible], but to get the cluster, to have it actually happen was like "Wow." [Laughter] So of the eight years, what was the most important? Was it the cluster? Now, having the people that develop economic policy see what agriculture is and can do, part of our thing was really talking about export. In our case, it was more of what is imported that we could displace with our end product, and the potential there is like 80% or more. In season, we do pretty good. We could do much, much better. We don't do the [Unintelligible], so there's a lot of potential where we could go. It's still very, very large and we can bring it down, and it gets right down to the dues is prorated according to what your growth income is, and then after you paid your dues to participate in the program, whatever your dues is you paid out to participate in the program – and right now we have two programs; one is marketing and the other is waste management, and part of that is the ag plastics thing. That's another thing [Unintelligible].

LL: The ag plastics, is John [Unintelligible] helping with this?

SF: Yes, he's an integral part of it. Then there's the ag in the classroom and we've got that little project going on in Hartford and that was a lot of fun, but the thing about it that surprised me, when we worked with the Hartford kids, a lot of them are first-generation Americans. Inner city kids who are first-generation Americans know a lot more about agriculture than kids that lived in [Unintelligible]. It's incredible, absolutely incredible. So that was a good thing that we got going there too, but I can't tell you which – it's between the cluster and the regional market. It's one of those, and it's got to do with looking at it for a long period of time and getting someone to buy into your idea and take your idea and massage it

and make it their own idea so they believe in it because now it's their idea, and then taking it to that next step and making it something that could really make it work. You got to plan of action [Unintelligible] and that happened in both those places, regional market and [Unintelligible], but the cluster could [Unintelligible].

LL: One last question. What do you think that we should [Unintelligible]? The other thing you said that you started might or might not go on, but generically, when you mention the percentages of the small farm, some of the small farm [Unintelligible]. From your knowledge of what is going on in agriculture, where are [Unintelligible] going to continue?

SF: One of the things that was very cultural that I see over the last three or four years has changed dramatically is people are encouraging their children to be involved in agriculture in some aspect. When I was getting out of high school, '59, '60s, probably up into the '70s and maybe '80s, parents were saying, "Do something besides farming. This is how it works, there's no money." Because people have turned to more market-oriented stuff, not wholesale commodities, but – and the value-add is a part of it, but mostly it's retail-oriented. So for the same amount of work, you're getting more for your money and more for your time, more for your effort. The prospects don't look so glum anymore, and so more of the younger generation I think is interested in continuing that. That's not the [Unintelligible]improvement; that failed because it wasn't practical. These are business-minded people who are willing to work hard, but they're not willing to work hard for nothing. There's a lot of conversation around way of life versus business. They don't necessarily have to be different. In the governor role, perception is everything. Selling the perception to the public that the farmer is there because it's a way of life [Unintelligible] and then sharing some part of that with the public and giving a taste for it, that's [Unintelligible] and I see it unfolding. I see dairy farmers diversifying. I see more of "We sold the cows, but we won't sell the land. We rent the land to the guy next door who might get bigger and who might have more, larger dairy farms," but I don't know how far that's going to go because of CAFO, because of the waste products. This is by and large a wet state.

LL: Tell us what CAFO is.

SF: Confined animal feeding operations. If you've got 600 cows in a quarter of an acre, you've got a lot of manure in one spot. What are you going to do with it? If you've got 20 in that same space, you can easily spread it on your field. So there'll be some people that are going to go very large and they're going to use the highest technology like bio-digesters and things like that to sell [Unintelligible]. They heat your home with gases from their manure, but they're not a very large farm, really. They're what, 100 cows, I think? I don't think we're going to have very many cows and cow farms in this space. I just don't see that happening. We definitely need to use the phrase "close up agriculture." The neighbors are too close, that's [Unintelligible], but I don't know how much further we can go on these gigantic sizes. I think we're going to go further with smaller farms continuing to carry the load and everything. It happened for centuries, it's happening again. We have people who are buying 40 acres and at first they buy the 40 acres for the space and maybe they have a horse or they have something [Unintelligible]. Now we're looking at "You know what? If we were to raise some crops that the public wants on 20 of those 40 acres, now we're really a farm business and I no longer have to go to my job downtown because now I can make money right here on the farm, or maybe I don't need to go downtown all the time." So I see more smaller farm businesses with an emphasis on the business end. It's going to happen, really, and that's not to say that it's not a way of life. It's still a way of life. If you're a person that likes to grow apples and you're out there raising apples and that's your thing, that's still a way of life for you, but depending on how you market your product, now it's a business, and the more successful you market your product, the more you are at the same business and thereby people are going to know [Unintelligible]. I was a huge advocate of the Farming Preservation Program and I still am, but it's not the whole answer.[Unintelligible] of land isn't the answer. It's all about profitability. I said that here recently and there are a lot of large farmers [Unintelligible] and I said efficiency is not the answer. We've

got very efficient, very large farms that are going under because they can't afford all these efficiencies that you told them they got to do.

LL: That's what happened I think out in the Midwest when they went under.

SF: Yes. Profitability is where it's at, and it's profitability across the board. A good farmer is a small farmer that [Unintelligible]. The answer is getting a price that I can make a living on. There's the answer right there. How are we going to do it? I don't have all the answers, but this selling of the aesthetics of agriculture, if a family can, in five or 10 minutes, get to an area where they think they're in a wide, open space – I remember many years ago when a housing development opened up here in town and it's right near the center of town. Now they got a new quarter acre and there's another across town. I said to one of the women – my kid was [Unintelligible] and I dropped the kid off and I said, "How can you stand living in this kind of area?" She looked at me and she said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "Well, you're [Unintelligible]." She looked at me and said, "I'm [Unintelligible]." So everything kind of fits in with where you came from and I think we can continue to convince people that agricultural businesses are good for the state. They're good for the economy, they're good for the environment, and they're good for Joe Schmo that wants to take his family out and pick some apples or pick some blueberries or whatever it is he's going to pick. Now we got corn mazes, huge success. Our neighbor down the road who is the last guy who decided to [Unintelligible] to sell his cows, the last couple of years he's had a corn maze. He's making more money in a month than we're making in a year. You can see [Unintelligible] a place like that.

LL: Then the dependence of – some farmers have chosen – I have cousins who were farmers – they're farmers now and they really didn't like being around people. In fact, one of the people I interviewed said, "I want my wife to take care of the business because I just want to be out in the tractor. I don't want to be here when they all arrive to bring their kids out and look at pumpkins." He said, "That's her part of the business."

SF: That's the big thing that we're dealing with. I don't typically like the idea of the public on the farm. There's a lot of things, a lot of liabilities and all that. So we're caught between we've got to do something different. If we're all going to stay together as a family on the farm, we've got to get some more money. The price of milk isn't probably going to get that much better [Unintelligible], and the other side is how do we have the public here and all the marketing people [Unintelligible]? What is it that you can produce that people are going to want to come and buy? Then the second thing is why are we going to come to you to buy it? So what's your competition? We have one other ice cream store in town right in the center in town and you go in and you buy your ice cream and you sit in the parking lot. So it's good ice cream, it's fine, very popular, but it's in a parking lot. What we have here is a view. We have cows and a field and all that. So the job now is to allow folks to come, enjoy their ice cream while they're enjoying the view, and not intermingle with the tractors and the corn, the silage blower and all those horribly dangerous things, and because people have not been around those kinds of machines, they don't understand the danger, and the parents these days, I don't know what's the matter with them. We've had a farm stand over in front of Jerry's house for nine years now, but we've determined we're not going to do it there anymore because these idiot parents open the car door on the road side and the kids get out onto the road, and it's our fault if they got hurt as far as the law is concerned. So we said we got away with it for nine years and that's great. We're not doing it anymore. So what we're trying to do is make a place where people come in the farm driveway and immediately pull away from the farm driveway and over into this ice cream area, put on an attractive fence, but a fence that you can see through, but people understand there's a fence. There's a reason for a fence, that means you can't go beyond the fence and try to – we're going to give it a try. So we've got our own set of gos and no-gos and we've crossed the first go/no-go. It's a go and sometimes I wonder [Unintelligible]. I'm having a good time doing nothing here. [Laughter] My sister-and-law and I just [Unintelligible] said, "Okay, let me

understand this. You're 61, you're going to take your life savings and you're going to put it into this business, you're going to make a product that right now you have no idea how to make, and then you go work your tail off for two or three years [Unintelligible]. Do I have that right?" [Laughter] Yes, she's got that right.

LL: So will you take your own milk and have it processed to make your ice cream, or will you be buying your ice cream?

SF: I would love to do that at some point in the future, but there's so much equipment needed. So for right off the bat, it probably [Unintelligible] which will probably come from [Unintelligible] and will be our own milk along with other people's, but we can honestly say that's our milk that we're making the ice cream with. We would have to pasteurize the milk first and we'd have to separate the milk from the [Unintelligible]. You'd have to have a market for both in order to make it feasible. You're going to have to locate all these machines first and then you'd have to purchase it, you'd have to build a building to put it in, so that's always been – I don't even call that a goal. I call that a dream, but my husband and my daughter have – and my son's [Unintelligible] have always thought it would be great fun to have a glass milk bottle that says [Unintelligible] farm. I'm willing to help them move forward with that, but I've been very frank and open with the family that I ain't doing this forever. [Laughter] One of the things I did for myself as a present to me for being a commissioner and all that entails as far as the crunch on your personal stuff is I don't [Unintelligible]. We took what was a cow pasture and I've got a very [Unintelligible] I'd take you out there, but it has a great walkway down to a sunken garden, it's beautiful. I've got a little garden house and a fenced in area for my vegetables and I've got flower beds everywhere, and I said, "I want to be able to spend some time in this very beautiful garden I built too." So I'm saying to them I want someone to say to me in three years, "I will take over for you." I don't mind doing the really hard work. I don't mind hard work, I like hard work, but I'm much better at starting something and getting it going and then let someone else take over. I think that's part of why I feel like I'm done as commissioner. We've got the business plan, we've got the cluster, we did this, we did that, but now it's up to them. I want to try something new. I guess I just need a different challenge.

LL: Thank you very, very, very much.

(End of Interview)