

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

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Name of Person Interviewed: Dr. Ted Kersting, Dean, CANR, UCONN
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LL: This is January 15, 2000. north of Columbus, Ohio. Today I am interviewing the former Dean of the College of Agriculture at the University of Connecticut Ted Kersting. Thank you very much for agreeing to do this.

TK: You're welcome.

LL: I have explained the project to you, so let's start. Would you tell us where you were born.

TK: Ottawa, Ohio. It is up in the northwestern part of the state. Ottawa was the County Seat of Putnam County.

LL: And were you raised all your life in that.

TK: No, no. I lived there for several years and then moved; I guess I moved to Florida and then Texas. From Texas we moved to Minnesota ; Minnesota back to Ohio and then to Oxford, Ohio where I graduated from high school.

LL: Were you from an agricultural family?

TK: Not really. I was from an agricultural community. My grandfather, my maternal grandfather, owned and operated a hardware store. Most of what went in and out of the hardware store dealt with agriculture in this community of Ottawa, about 2500 people.

LL: Where did you spend most of your high school years?

TK: High school years, one year in Ottawa, my freshman year. My sophomore, junior and senior years were in Oxford at Maguffy High School, which was part of Miami University.

LL: There used to be a Miami woman's college down there too. Miami woman's College?

TK: That was Western College for women.

LL: That's what it was. Western College for women.

TK: It is now a part of Miami.

LL: Now, when did you decide to... Did you know you were going to go to college?

TK: Not really.

LL: Oh.

TI: Not really. That came after World War II.

LL: So you went in the service?

TK: I was in the service, yes.

LL: You came back on the GI Bill.

TK: I came back and used the GI Bill, that is correct.

LL: And when you started out, did you know you were going to go into agriculture?

TK: No. Not really.

LL: What was your first major?

TK: Well... The objective was first of all, to see if I could make the first year of college, having been out of education for some time. I started at Ohio State and there were a lot of veterans there. I needed to brush up on various, you know requirements, admission requirements. I managed that very nicely and then decided during the process that I would like to get into veterinary medicine. That was my focus and I completed Veterinary Medicine in 1952.

LL: Had you had any interest in this area before that? Had you any inclination that you were going to go into veterinary medicine.

TK: Well yes I had, off and on. I knew several veterinarians; I worked with a veterinarian in Ottawa when I was not even in junior high school. We did calls... a lot of farm calls.

More farm calls than you might expect, more than dog and cat calls. I did the same thing when I lived in Oxford. I knew a veterinarian there and I used to make calls with him. I used to visit with him. He encouraged it. During the Service years, the thought came back from time to time. Probably the most important aspect of my career was getting married and marrying the daughter of a physician in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I moved out there after I got back, working with the United War Fund, Phil Graham, and met my present wife at that time. Her father, my father-in-law was very encouraging. He was in medicine. He graduated from the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine and went on from there.

We got married and decided that we both better finish our educations. She had finished her education as a social worker, but she needed a Master's degree to proceed any further. She went to the University of

Chicago. I went to Ohio State after she finished in Chicago. She didn't finish her Master's degree in Chicago, she finished that at Ohio State.

LL: What was the fund you said you went to?

TK: The United War Fund was the umbrella, for a variety of organizations that were helping war efforts. They help the Red Cross, for example, and they had coffee and cookies and cakes, to give an example.

LL: So were you in the service when you did this or you were out of the service and did this?

TK: You want my service years? My service years I volunteered. I was in the service, I have forgotten, not too many months because of a cardiac problem, it wasn't a problem but it was something that frightened the physician. He picked up a murmur, a systolic murmur. and gave me an honorary discharge. I had volunteered for the service so I was free again. So, I volunteered for an organization known as the American Field Service and they sent me overseas. I had a choice, I could go to the Middle East, I could go to the Far East, I could go the European theater. I talked to a history professor at Miami. I was living in Oxford at the time and he said, "Why don't you go to the Far East. It is a lot more enchanting." He said, "You might find things there that you would never find anywhere else." I decided to go check his suggestion. I let New York, where the headquarters were, know what I wanted to do and they said we will give you a call. I had all my papers ready. I had the federal FBI investigate me to see whether or not I was a spy or something before I could get a passport to get out of this country. That finally went through. Folks up in Ottawa would ask me what was going on because everybody from the FBI had been by to check up on me.

LL: Now, did you meet your wife when you went there and you came back... How did you meet her, she's from Oklahoma?

TK: Well, I came back and had an uncle who was here for the National War Fund. He said, "Well we are going to have to get you a job until you can settle down and decide what you want to do." He said, "I know of one out in Tulsa, Oklahoma, raising money for the various agencies." So I got a job with the United Way and that is where I met my wife. She at the time had finished her college work and was working in one of the social agencies. Now we were on the same floor and it was inevitable that we would see each other and say, "Hello," to each other. She told me one time that she would be happy to show me around. I had no car and no friends, other than new friends. We got along very well and subsequently got married.

LL: So now we are going to jump ahead where you were before. You both went back to school.

TK: Yes.

LL: And, when you finished Ohio State, then where did you go?

TK: Well I went into the practice in Columbus, a small animal practice at the edge of town. There were some large animal practices. That as gradually fading out as the city grew and picked up the farms for development and so forth. At the same time my main contact was the profession where I had graduated at Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine. I attended various professional meetings. We met almost every month or two to discuss problems, new cases, etc. I ran into Ben Nielson. Ben Nielson and his wife who is a veterinarian, Lorraine Nielson, who lived in Oxford and Storrs. She died recently.

LL: Um.

TK: He was about to finish his PhD and he and Lorraine moved to Storrs. I said<"Well you know I might get into the educational business. I think I will take a year off and do a sabbatic at my own expense." He said, "Let me see what I can find out." So he talked with the Head of the Department, Charlie Humble at the time. They had a research assistantship available. Paid me \$6500 a year. So I got to work on a Master's degree which I completed subsequently at University of Connecticut. I went back to my practice. I had rented it out to a colleague, who kind of maintained it for me. I finished some of my surgical research there that dealt with the effect on the kidney of antifreeze poison. Not too many years ago people substituted that for the alcohol after it was denatured. So I head back into my office and got a call from Charlie Humble asking whether or not I would be interested in a position that was opening very shortly, as Extension Veterinarian of the State of Connecticut, through the Extension Service. Charlie had apparently worked this out with the folks in Extension. So there you have it. That propelled me to Connecticut. I knew the difference in the breeds of cows, but not a hell of a lot more. But I learned a lot, you know. I got along quite well. I had a lot of help from people like Don Grant and Al Cowan and Don Kinsman and I got my kids enrolled in 4H with sheep.

LL: What year would that have been?

TK: Shoot. That would have been 1959 and 19... 1960 and 61. We moved to Connecticut then I think in 1962 and I became a member of the staff I signed on as an Associate Professor.

LL: What were some of the key things that you remember about the agricultural environment when you arrived, with the animals?

TK: Looking at it in a large sense, the environment was good in many ways. The problems that I saw and certainly I had been told about, that others in agriculture had noticed, was the decline in the number of dairy farms. When I went out there, there must have been 13-1400 dairy farms in the state of Connecticut. I think that when I retired there was probably only 6 or 700 and I think that, I would imagine about the number today.

LL: Or less than that.

TK: Or less than that. The horse business increased. I remember watching some of the Little International Shows in the spring my first few years there. There might have been one or two young women doing their stuff herding the pigs around with the cane and doing some horseback riding. When I left, when I left the Dean's office, I think that had almost entirely reversed. There were very few men in the horse program, any part of the horse program. They were all women. Incidentally and interesting enough, it was extending into veterinary medicine. Seventy-five percent or more of the freshman for the past several years have been women. I am talking about the, those who were admitted.

LL: Nationally.

TK: Nationally. And there are something like twenty some schools of veterinary medicine in this country.

LL: Why do you think that is happening?

TK: Well I think women have, and I compliment them for this, reached a point where they are asserting themselves. They can do just as good a job, if not better, than a lot of men did, when the men were doing what, half the time were men's jobs.

LL: Uh huh.

TK: Other women had found that they could do just as well if not better. Women have far more understanding and gentle with animals than men.

LL: What were particular focused areas of your research. Could you talk about those a little bit?

TK: Well, my own project was dealing with alcohol with antifreeze poisoning of small animals. Often times a car will spring a leak, and people would change antifreeze in the springtime and put in fresh antifreeze and just run it down in the ground. The animals would come along and drink it. It has a taste that apparently attracted them but it could kill you.

LL: There's trouble with some domesticated animals now, in garages with antifreeze.

TK: That 's right, that's right. As far as the rest of my research is concerned it was quite limited, primarily because of my Extension responsibility. You know, as an Extension person yourself, you are going day and night. You hardly have time to keep up with the, new mate rial, the reading material. I get a couple of bulletins with people like Al Jensen or Lynn Brown in Animal Science. And then supporting others. An example of that would be a chap, Bill, I can't remember these names. Anyhow, this fellow was in the Department of Animal Industries, they called it at that time, and he was working on preservation of bull semen. Well he wanted a bull who's seminal vesicle was a part of the reproductive tract. He wanted a bull intact without the seminal vesicle. (Laugh.) He challenged me one time to see if I could do it and I said, "Well we'll try it." Well I got some, some organs from the slaughter house, not too far from Storrs... I can't think of the name of that either...

LL: That's all right.

TK: I took a look at them, calibrated the animal that he had to see if I could do it. It took me almost thirteen hours to do the job, but we finally got the seminal vesicles out. I had students from all classes coming in. I was all by myself. I did all of the anesthetic work using procaine as a spinal anesthetic. This bull would keep moving around. I had my arm clear up to my elbow in there removing those seminal vesicles. But those are the things that kept me busy and really kept me from doing my own research. I used to help Sam Eaton with some of his research. They would want something... we relocated some of the arterial vessels in some of these calves. However, nutritional work was what Sam Eaton was doing.

LL: So it was your background in surgery. They had no one else there that...

TK: With large animal surgery, that's right. I was the only one who had any background on that. And I didn't have a whole lot. Once in a while I would get an emergency. I did several surgical procedures on animals that were having difficult deliveries, obstructive things. It was one of the my responsibilities to take care of the animals on the campus.

LL: The herd.

TK: The herd. That included, it must have been over in the science building College of Arts and Sciences. They had laboratory animals. As time went by the federal government became involved so I helped them stay in, in...

LL : Good graces.

TK: Good graces, that's right, (Chuckles) in compliance with all the regulations. LL: At that time we

were doing a lot of breeding with horses?

TK: That's always been... that has been going on for years. (Clears throat) I made some movies of, of a foaling mare for example and a foaling pony. She used this for 4H. Before I could show those movies, back in those days you had to get the parent's approval, you had to get the 4H agent to approve it, to see this foal being delivered. That one with the little pony, the head was delivered and the mare got down and kind of rolled around and then she got up and walked around. Meanwhile the foal was kind of moving his head, looking around and wondering what was going on. Laughs. It's a good movie.

LL: Laughs. They let you use it?

TK: Yes. Not all of the 4H clubs would use it. LL: Laughs. Did you, did you leave it?

TK: It should be there somewhere. I have a copy at home.

LL: Okay, I will remember that. Did you go on to become a Department Head first or did you go directly to becoming Dean?

TK: I went, I went from the department to Assistant Dean, under Dean Young, and director of the two- year school, Director of Ratcliffe Hicks. I did that only a year or two and then Dean Young decided to retire. I did not make any attempt to politicize my activities and seek the position. I just let it go. So I had no... I was as surprised as anyone else I think when Babbidge appointed me Dean.

LL: So at that time searches were done differently. They didn't do all the affirmative action stuff that they do now with the searches.

TK: That is very true.

LL: Everything has gotten more complex.

TK: Very complex.

LL: How long were you Dean?

TK: Seventeen years or something like that.

LL: Can you think of some of the things that happened within the world of agriculture because you were out with other people in your role as Dean. And, what was happening in the college? There are two different roads we can travel here, either what you saw happening during that period of time in agriculture and then what you saw happening within the college itself

TK: (Clears throat) Well the thing that bothered me has been the administrative responsibilities, diminishing support. Diminished support on the part of the institution, diminished support coming from the Department of Agriculture because their support was being diminished as well. For the most part, people in Connecticut were not just interested in agriculture. It was difficult to stir up that interest so that they would get out and, you know, beat the drums for you. What do you have in the way of agriculture down in the so- called Gold Coast? Folks that live in New York.

LL: Horses.

TK: Yeah, horses. Exactly. But you can't sustain agriculture just with horses.

LL: So who...

TK: And agriculture also includes the environment.

LL: Uh huh.

TK: And it was difficult to get support for that. One of the things that hurt us probably as much as anything was when, I can't think of the man's name now, he was Commissioner of Agriculture after Gill retired.

LL: Herndon.

TK: Hum?

LL: Herndon or Blumb. Herndon came after Gill, Blumb came after Gill.

TK: What was the fellow, the broker from New York? He lives out in Litchfield County. There are three names in the brokerage name.

LL: Oh, I don't know that.

TK: Well he became, he was appointed, he was a dem... he was a...

LL: Republican.

TK: Republican. He was appointed... He was appointed Commissioner of Environment or whatever they called it, and took it away from agriculture.

LL: He took the part of the... he split it off.

TK: Uh huh.

LL: I will have to check to see who that was.

TK: Yes. That weakened I think all of agriculture.

LL: Now, there is legislation periodically to put them back together again.

TK: I would be in favor of that.

LL: What did you think were some of the biggest satisfactions you had while you were Dean of The College of Agriculture. The biggest satisfaction...

TK: Well I think, I think changing the name of the College of Agriculture to College of its present name.

LL: Agriculture and Natural Resources.

TK: Uh huh. And changing the name of the Department of Pathobiology, what at that time was, what the heck did we call it, the Department of Animal Diseases.

LL: Okay.

TK: It was more reflective of what the department was doing. It was doing some dandy research. At one time that department had people coming from around the entire world studying the diseases of chickens. It had the largest collection of microscopic slides, chicken diseases of any place in the world. They came from Australia, they came from everywhere. Charlie Humble was a super leader and maintained that reputation to the point where they needed help. They needed more staff. The department itself had board-certified pathologists. At one time there were only two, Ben Nielson and Charlie Humble. They finally got enough money to bring a few more in but, we lost every time we had someone in a state position. We had state funds for the salary. Every time we would lose somebody that position would revert to the university's administration. They always had a place for one of those that they could pick up from us. It annoyed a lot of us.

LL: And they would put him some place else.

TK: Yea. They couldn't use the Federal funds, though.

LL: Right.

TK: For the Experiment Stations and for the Extension Service. They (university administration) could certainly use the State-funded position anyway they wished.

LL: What kinds of differences did you see either in teaching loads or research focus of other faculties while you were here.

TK: In the college?

LL: Yes. Because, like at one time we had a very big Rural Sociology Department and then we had, Ag Engineering and it changed. I am not saying that it is right or wrong, just things change. What can you remember about any of that?

TK: Well, I remember the pressures that the university administration brought on us about doing something about Rural Sociology and Economics, combining the two.

LL: Hum.

TK: That's essentially what we were told to do. It took several years to accomplish. I dragged my feet as much as I could. I think the other staff members saw the same thing. I just couldn't, you know, publicly damn the institution. Walter McCain was good, well trained, knowledgeable, and well known for his work. He was the Head of the department. He retired and I lost some friends there because he was a very influential person in the faculty.

LL: Oh I see.

TK: You know I felt, I felt I was losing track and, and hold of the Extension program when Henry Hanson decided to retire. Ann Rideout finally came in and she did as good a job as she could. And by the way, I encouraged her to run for the Department of Agriculture.

LL: Commissioner?

TK: Absolutely. And she was invited to do so and then she changed her mind. I don't understand that. She would have made the first female, if she was... As far as I know she was the first female ever to be

recommended for the position.

LL: What kinds of changes were happening within Extension when Henry Hanson left?

TK: I don't remember any great changes that were happening. That was a fairly stable organization. There wasn't a lot of turn over in personnel.

LL: What do you think has brought you the greatest satisfaction in your professional life? You were talking about that during Homer Babbidge's time you had to do, basically a White Paper on the college.

TK: Early on in his administration, I think that was his second year, he wanted a statement on...actually what he wanted was a presentation of the benefits of the College of Agriculture to the State of Connecticut and to the University of Connecticut prepared for the use of the Trustees of the university.

LL: I think I have found notes and correspondence about that.

TK: Yep..

LL: So then, it was...

TK: I was pleased because it was a very well done presentation. I presented it, but I sure as hell didn't put it together. A lot of people spent a lot of time on that and I think they felt that it was a well-done presentation.

LL: This would have been in, one of these was done in the 70's. There was a similar kind of project done in the late 50s.

TK: I wasn't there then.

LL: No, that's right. So this would have had to have been in the 70s.

TK: That's right.

LL: I found two different sets of notes. Now, I was talking to Al Gray the other day and he has pictures, what a memory, (laughs) and he answered some questions I had because I found old photos here and there of the old Poultry Building and the old Animal Dairy building over near what would be the Ag Engineering building now...

TK: Yeah.

LL: I have seen building on a map but no one could tell me which building the pictures were of He knew... and he had pictures of all of them.

TK: That's great, that's great.

LL: Yup. Now those two buildings were tom down during Babbidge, it that correct? TK: I think so, yes. Or else just before.

LL: All right. And, and was this because they were outdated? Do you have any recollection as to why they were tom down?

TK: No I don't.

LL: They are right on the highway for one thing.

TK: Right on the highway.

LL: But both those building disappeared about the same, were tom down about the same time.

TK: Uh huh, and I can't help you with that.

LL: Um, what kind of technology changes, were happening in the world in which you were working, in either your own research, research you were helping with, or that you saw happening in agriculture?

TK: Well I think the computer takes the cake in that!

LL: Laughs. Uh huh.

TK: I don't believe its your bookkeeper or veterinary surgeon or an animal scientist with two PhDs. I think the computer certainly takes the cake. Now there are a lot of other things that I can imagine. I haven't given any thought to that but it came along and was part of the changing times; the electron microscope for example.

LL: The electron?

TK: Electron microscope, in my field. It took a long time for the department of pathobiology and anthropobiology to get a new electron microscope. This was advanced stuff, otherwise it would have just been a plain light...

LL: Microscope.

TK: ... microscope. Yeah.

LL: And how expensive would it have been when it first came out?

TK: I don't know, thousands of dollars. Probably \$5,000, \$10,000. It depended upon who you bought it from. The Japanese helped develop it.

LL: And did this have to come out of the Department budget or did it come from grants?

TK: Well, an item like that I have forgotten. But, an item like that would probably have used state funds. It could use Experiment Station funds as long as the work was related to work with the Experiment Station. We might have used private donations. And, we might have used income generated by some of the activities of the various departments. Some departments could charge for their products.

LL: Like, like say pathobiology who is doing services for the state.

TK: Yes that would be one way. Another way, for example, is the Department of Plant Science generates income from some of the plants that they grow. Some of their new...

LL: Uh huh.

TK: The department of what used to be Animal Industries and now is Animal...

LL: Animal science.

TK: ... Animal Science. They generate income from the animals they sell.

LL: Now did the Nutritional Sciences change come in during your time as the Dean?

TK: Yes.

LL: Before, that building had been a new Poultry Science Building?

TK: Poultry Science.

LL: What happened to the faculty as a result of this?

TK: They stayed. They all became nutritional science people, most of them are biochemists anyhow.

LL: Okay, I see.

TK: That's where Bob Jenson was, Lloyd Matterson.

LL: I've come across his name. Uh huh.

TK: Uh, Eddie Singson,

LL: Oh yes. Are there any things that you did as Dean, regionally or nationally, as you went around with other deans and so on, that made you see how Connecticut was different from other parts of the country as far as the College of Agriculture went?

TK: I think we all had similar problems with the smallness and the size of Connecticut. It left a lot to be desired. I, was visiting with the Dean at Ohio State University. The Dean at Ohio State University spoke to the Ohio legislature with respect to their Experiment Station. One experiment station in Ohio and in Connecticut there are two Experiment Stations. The one in New Haven could speak to the legislature and the one at Storrs is restricted. We could not go to the legislature itself because it was a state institution I had to go through the president's office for the most part.

LL: Uh huh.

TK: Those, those were the differences. Other than that I was always very proud of the fact that I could call somebody else in Texas or a place that I think of right now, in Arizona about irrigation. I met this chap at a meeting and probably would see him again. I called him up and said, "Bill I have a question here about irrigation." "What do you want to know, Ted? And I explained the situation to him and the situation actually showed up. The pilot was retiring from Lufton, that 's a German airplane. What's the one from Holland? Well, you know as well as I do. Anyhow he was retiring and bought quit a few acres of land on the island, in the Caribbean. He wanted to grow vegetables down there because all of the vegetables coming into this island came from offshore.

LL: Uh huh.

TK: Came down from our country and so forth.

LL: Go ahead.

TK: So I actually called out there to get the information for him. On one of his trips back to this country he would call to see what I had done, what information I could get for him and so forth. That to me, to be able to... the ability to call these people, it was a close-knit group. I enjoyed the exposure to the Secretary of Agriculture. We would get there together and we could talk with him. In some cases we knew him reasonably well and would call him by his first name. Some of, most of the them wanted to be called by their first name. It was a good fraternity so to speak, a good sorority...

LL: Uh huh.

TK: ... more and more women became present though I don't know what they are doing today. I was on the national committee at the request of the Secretary of Agriculture to develop a program for funds, federal funds for agriculture research. Animal research primarily. Now I learned a lot there. I enjoyed that exposure. I did not feel that I was any more or any less than the people from the big states or Rhode Island.

LL: Did you see... Because of where our agriculture is located in proximity to towns and cities, did you ever see any or have a chance to discuss how agriculture takes place in the other states?

TK: What do you mean by takes place.

LL: Well like in being from the Midwest now, where you have more and more acreage so you are not in as close proximity to towns. Whereas in Connecticut a lot of people worked off-farm or a lot of people, like you mentioned the pilot, people lived a rural lifestyle, but who did something else to earn their livelihood. They still considered themselves dabbling, if you will, into agriculture. Or they retired to agriculture because they had lived in those areas. So what we had in agriculture was not large, but it was different. TK: It was quite diversified, when you stop to think about it, in Connecticut.

LL: Now, we have bison, we also have llamas and we have... there's a new one...

TK: Alpaca?

LL: Yes, yes. So we have more of those kinds of herds now too.

TK: Those are hobby types of agriculture.

LL: Well, we have more hobby farms maybe now, then before.

TK: I think all of them have more hobby farms in comparable states. It is hard to compare a New England State with someone beyond New England.

LL: Yes.

TK: The Midwest to the West.

LL: But they still produce food out there, too.

KK: I think the food production, as far as New England is concerned, if we had to depend on food, I think we'd have a difficult time.

LL: And what happens if it ever, if transportation every gets cut off

TK: Well it would be very difficult...laughs. You know, it's so unlikely that that would happen.

LL: Then you have the lifestyle. Al Cowan mentioned, he said that the term "hobby farms" he likes to call, "lifestyle farms">

TK: That's fine.

LL: I'd never heard that term before.

TK: It's a good term, "lifestyle farms."

LL: Because they have a chance to live the real lifestyle. Now you mentioned Pennsylvania before. Would you say that again about the population?

TK: In Pennsylvania?

LL: In Pennsylvania, yes.

TK: There are more people in what would be described as rural areas, small towns, then living in the totals of the big cities. Of course one of the big cities would be Philadelphia.

LL: Or Pittsburgh and so on.

TK: Exactly, exactly.

LL: But the small towns, the total number of people in small towns outnumbers the total number of people in metropolitan areas.

TK: Metropolitan areas, yea. That's in the brochure.

LL: It would be an interesting comparison to make in Connecticut, too, because we have the large cities. Are there personal friendships or associations that you can remember that were of special importance to you?

TK: Laughs. I always took a broad view of the people I knew.

LL: Laughs.

TK: Always considered them friends... it would be a rare day that I would walk into a restaurant and having never been here before, not find somebody to talk to.

LL: Okay.

TK: I can do that almost anywhere. Laughs. That doesn't help you any.

LL: The tape is about out. Thank you very much!

(End of Interview)