

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

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Name of Person Interviewed: Joseph Ruwet (A)
 Virginia Ruwet (B)

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LL: Luane Lange interviewing Joseph Ruwet in Torrington, Connecticut and I've asked to speak with him because his family's been in this area a long time and because you also served in the Legislature and have been active with the Farm Bureau. So, all of these things. So, would you start by talking about where you were born and when, if you'd like to tell us?

JR: I was born...in Torrington on October 9, 1917. We moved on to this particular farm in October of 1921. And we've been here on the farm ever since,...I am eighty-two years old and I don't mind mentioning it. I'm just fortunate to have good health at this particular time and hope to continue on. But...

LL: Where did your parents come from? Had they been in agriculture before?

JR: Dad's father worked in Litchfield on many of the farms. That's what everybody did in those days is work on a farm. And then dad also worked as a manager on two different farms himself in Litchfield. And then...mother and dad got together and married, so that they decided to buy a farm in Torrington. And they bought the farm in Torrington from George B. Goodwin. He was a gentleman who bought up farms because of the wood and the forestry on...these particular farms. Most of the wood was cut off and brought to the American Brass Company to burn into the muffles to melt the brass and...and the alloys. It was a big company with factories all the way down the Naugatuck Valley. Torrington was one branch...the main branch was in Waterbury and also another plant in Ansonia. So George Goodwin bought these farms, had the wood all drawn down by horse and buggy. Or horse and wagon, I should say, because the wagons were quite big in those times. And fired the muffles in American Brass. And the land, after he got through cutting them off, he tried to sell to interested people that wanted to farm.

LL: Now had...he was a contractor for American Brass? American Brass didn't do their own wood?

JR: No, they didn't do their own. He was doing the actual work and the hauling and hiring different...farmers around the area to bring in this wood to fire the muffles.

LL: How many acres then were in the property when they first started?

JR: It was a hundred and thirty-five acres on this particular farm at the time.

LL: Had your mother come from an agriculture family?

JR: Mother had nothing to do with agriculture. She worked at one of the factories in town and I can't think just where it was...maybe it was the Torrington Company which is a needle shop they call it, small needle shop. They made all kinds of needles, sewing needles and surgical needles and things like that. And now it produces bearings and it's owned by Ingersoll-Rand. So that...but they still have their main office right here in Torrington. Thank God, it's...it's one of the biggest industries we have in Torrington. But dad and mother decided to buy the farm from Mr. Goodwin and I think they paid twelve thousand dollars for the farm at that time and they decided to go into the poultry business. The farm buildings were set up more for a small little dairy and they also had hogs, pigs at the time. But they decided they wanted poultry. So they bought a couple hundred chickens and raised pullets and then they started laying and they sold the eggs and so forth and they built the business up to quite a hatchery. They hatched eggs and so forth and sold baby chicks and made eggs of course, for the Connecticut Poultry Producers Association. Dad was quite active in that organization, the Connecticut Poultry Association. And this is how they made a living. And this got into the '29's and so forth through the Depression and it got kind of hard., There was six of us children so that expenses were a little higher and so forth, so they did have to sell off twenty-five acres of the farm to pay the mortgage like everybody does now, only on a little smaller scale. And they did build up the poultry business to around ten thousand birds which was big at that time. Now of course, it's in the millions and so forth. But I believe that in those days they did very well. Mother did a lot of canning. Everything was grown on the farm you know and everybody pitched in and lugged the potatoes and took care of the weeds in the garden and always had a cow and a horse to get milk and make butter and things like that. So we were kind of lucky to have a mother and a father that were interested in agriculture. And all of my brothers and sisters; you know, it was an education within itself and that's how you learned. And then as we grew older and 4-H came along and we were active in the 4-H and it was an education. Had wonderful 4-H leaders, volunteer leaders in the neighborhood. Dad was a leader of the Poultry Club. So...

LL: Did your mother continue to work at off the farm also? No, she sorted & packed and sometimes delivered eggs, made many of on clothes, raised vegetable & fruits.

JR: No, no. In those days, when you were married, you...you...we had...mother and dad had six children, four boys and two girls. We were a Catholic family and there was no Catholics in the neighborhood at the time so we used to walk down to church on Sunday in Torrington, three and a half miles. Went to church. But we always lived around the Congregational Church here in Torrington. And we always supported the church and we still continue...

LL: This is the one next door?

JR: Right next door. And so we had to more or less go into a Congregational Church area People were kind of close as far as religion is concerned but they did accept us in the community.

LL: How did this church end up in the middle of your land?

JR: Well, there's a fellow by the name of George Goodwin comes into play again. And he...the church was there before he, But, he kept giving them a little more land and then...they decided to have a Grange Hall. So he gave the land for the Torrington Grange Hall, Number 174. And it was just west...or just east of...east and north of the church...we had a big fire and the ministry burned and burned the Grange Hall and the church. But the...since then they put up a new church. You can see it is very modern...or it isn't an old...it's modern to our sense of...

LL: Do you know what year that would have been that burned?

JR: I can't think. I think it's about oh, fifteen, twenty years ago that it burned. It was kind of a sad dealings as far as the old church is concerned and the Grange Hall.

LL: Now, is the Grange still open in the area? Is there still a Grange in this part of the state?

JR: No. They...they...it was more of a social gathering rather than a farm organization in late years. So a lot of these Grange Halls or Granges merged. And Torrington went to Winchester. Part of the group went to Winchester Grange which is still active and also, the other half went to Eureka Grange in Nepaug which is in the Town of New Hartford. And that's one that I belong to in...in New Hartford at the present time.

LL: You start...you mention some of the chores you had as a youngster. What were your days like growing up? Did you...did you have electricity when you first...

JR: We didn't have any electricity on the farm when...when dad and mother moved in until oh, six or seven years after they moved in they could a Delco plant, they called it. And you had your own batteries set up and dad set up a well, we called it the shop and it's a little building away from the main house and that was our first electricity and then it grew from getting into the CL&P and this sort of thing and now we grew into Northeast Utilities. And now I understand they're going to merge with ConEd which is out of...New York State. So, that's how things really multiplied. But...

LL: So what were your particular chores?

JR: My...my chores was well, we did everything.

LL: You were...where were you in line of the children, oldest, youngest, middle?

JR: I'm...I'm the second one in the family. My older brother was Vincent who in later years chose to be in the Army. He had his career in the Army and spent his life as far as Colonel in the Army. So I stuck to the farm. During growing up I bought half of the farm from mother and dad because it didn't take as much land for poultry and I wanted to go into the dairy business. So I had a few cows and we started with making a couple of cans of milk. Well, it wasn't even a can of milk to start with. I had a couple of cows and I'd bring it up to small dairy, Burrville Dairy in Burrville which is in the Town of Torrington. And I remember this...this woman. She had a metal stick and she'd drop it into the forty quart milk can to see how many, quarts you had in the forty milk quart can. So it's less than a can when they started and then eventually produced more milk and got more cows and I got Mr. Weigold who runs the Torrington Creamery in Torrington and he took all my milk. Then eventually, they belonged to the CMPA which is the Connecticut Milk Producers Association and that was a solely co-op of farmers. And that continued on growing through well, Brock-Hall and that dairy merged with CMPA and then it...another merger went into Yankee Milk and then continue on further down into Pennsylvania. That took care of New England and New York State and down into Pennsylvania. And it's called AgriMark at the present time. So that's how things grew.

LL: How many cows did you then...in you herd, how many did you eventually...milking cows?

JR: On the home farm here, I was milking about thirty-five cows. And then I decided to get bigger after a process of getting married. I married my wife Virginia who is also a city gal, but soon learned how to be a farmer. And she did very well. We have seven children which we are very fortunate. They're all gone through college and very active in different things in the community and outside of the community. So, we've been lucky as far as that's concerned. But getting back to my dealings, I had to make a living and it was during the war, 1942. and so forth, so I always liked machine work.

So I went into American Brass and learned my trade as a machinist and tool maker. And I stuck to the farm, still made milk and continued you know, get up early and take care of the cows and so forth. And then went to work in the shop. I worked on first shift which is during the day I felt it was better for me to go on the second shift and that was from three to eleven and we managed to run the farm and still work in the shop. Then eventually after the war was over they still needed you know, to build up the Army and so forth and they still continued with machine work for a while. But I liked the farm so I got out and bought another farm, the Connecticut Livestock Farm. It's south on Torrington Street and there a hundred and seventy acres there that I bought. We built the herd up into a hundred and ten milkers. Which with the young stock, you had two hundred, two hundred and fifty animals. So, it was very interesting and at this time, all the boys helped with the chores and so forth. That's what big farm families always did. They always had their chores.

LL: I was going to ask, did you have hired help?

JR: Yes, we had...it was big enough so that we...we did have to get outside help and found some good help and found some good men that came down from Vermont and Maine and lived on the farm. Had a farmhouse down on the other Connecticut Livestock. property So that grew until my brother and brother-in-law went into the farm machinery

LL: The younger brother?

JR: That's my younger brother, George and I...my sister's husband was Harold Sibley. So they decided to into the farm machinery business in New Milford. So they started the New Milford Farm Machinery Business. It was International Harvester and so forth, all kinds of farm equipment and did very well. So there was another dealer in Torrington that decided to go out of the farm machinery business so I bought that business. We merged the two business, the Milford branch and the Torrington branch so that we, didn't have competition within the family, so that we did well. And then I still liked farming so I sold my interest to my brother-in-law and my brother and bought another farm in Nepaug which is in New Hartford, the Schibi farm. We milked ninety-six cows over there so that the...and it eventually produced...well, I don't know exactly the amount of pounds but we were quiet large at the time. Not as large as they are today. They have you know, they're milking five hundred cows and a thousand cows on many of the farms today in Connecticut.

LL: Now are any of your children still in the dairy business?

JR: No, no. They all decided to go you know, different...different other activities and to make a living and none of them really stayed on the farm. They're still interested in the farm but of course, a lot of... we've sold off to people who wanted to build houses and things like that and that's how I continued on. My wife and I continued on to get the family through colleges and so forth so you did those things and had to do them. And that's where your money was, you know. You couldn't save too much, you didn't make a lot of it making milk but you did have the land and the land was quite valuable. So...but the family have always stuck together. If I needed help or extra help, they always came in and...and gave us a hand.

So it...we were very fortunate.

LL: The hired help...well, let's go back to your kids first and then your own childhood. You went off...when you were in school, where did you go to school?

JR: I didn't...I went through eighth grade and then through my interest in the mechanics and so forth, I went to the State Trade School which was in Torrington. I graduated from the State Trade School. And...but it was more or less to take the place of the high school rather than...at that particular time.

LL: And then you were involved in metal shop?

JR: In shop work you know, lathe work and tool making which was very much interested during the war because you had all these dies and punches you had to make to produce brass cartridges for the bullets. So...and then it was come...come time and I should have said that during the war, the drafting of...of men Well, I wanted to go in because my brother was in the service and I wanted wouldn't let me because I was working on the farm producing milk and then this other work in American Brass as a machinist and tool maker which was something that they really had to have, So, they wouldn't let me go in the service. And as it turned out, it was just as well I didn't. It was the good days and all this is how I got my real education by experience. And I think sometimes it is the greatest teaching but...

LL: Did your father...I've talked with people whose fathers worked with them and eventually turned over the business or as you said, you bought out part of it. I've also talked to people whose fathers could not allow their sons for whatever reason, to become really involved. That they were more like employees of their fathers.

JR: Well, dad was always...dad and mother was always...we always respected their thoughts and their understandings and what they chose, as you know, wanted to follow through what they would like us to do. And my brother Eddie, more or less, took over the poultry business from dad and mother you see, so he continued on the same farm in the poultry business. Well, I always liked dairy through the 4-H program, actually, and then continued on and...and continue on the farm as a dairy, and some of the open acreage which I bought from dad and mother you see, so that...yes, that's right. Mother and dad always...and I...I thank God for some of the thoughts that they gave us, and they raised us well and...and they raised us to you know, respect and that's the biggest thing that I can remember. They always respect people and neighbors and good neighbors. We all had good neighbors.

LL: Talk about your neighbors a little bit.

JR: Well, the neighbors, you could...you could by name all the way up through to Winsted, remember the names of people, which is a lot different than today.

LL: Well, how many farms were here...between here and Winsted and how many miles was it from Winsted?

JR: Between here and Winsted was probably...well, between here and Winsted is about eight miles and there was probably oh, a dozen farms. And then south of us there were probably just about five to the Harwinton line. Everybody knew everybody. And they all helped together. If you needed a team of horses to come in to draw some wood out for the winter or things like that. Everybody helped one another. I think a little more so than they...they do today. Of course, everybody today will buy a little tractor or something like that and of course, they don't have near the amount of acreage. To me they're an acre or two they have, rather than thirty, forty or a hundred you see.

LL: When you were milking all of these cows, at what point did milkers come in, milking machines come in as opposed to hand milking?

JR: Well, it was...that's the first thing...we used to milk by hand to start with and then that was one of the first pieces of equipment I bought was the Delavale milker from a fella in Thomaston. Fellow the name of Black. I remember that anyway. But yes, they came along and that was a godsend. You know, they came into the stainless steel pails. To start with, we had the galvanized pails and now they've moved into the stainless steel pails and things like that. And then they eventually had the pipeline to go around the cows and now's...they have the free stalls and the milking parlors. But I never did get into the milking parlors. Mine was all the glass pipe around the barn and into the stainless steel milker. Milk cooler rather, rather than the old milk cans coolers they used to have. And that brings up another subject that I got into. A neighbor, a farmer neighbor and I were the first ones to pick up farm bulk tank from the farm. We had six farms. One, the first farm was in Sharon and we went over into Amenia and Ancram, Ancramdale, up into Copake, New York and back into Hartford with a load of milk every day...Well, getting back to a little history of this, a fellow by the name of Bud Fisher who was a manager of Sealtest Dairies in Hartford, and that was National Dairies, were looking for somebody to organize a group up into. In this case, the first was in Sharon and then over into New York State and Dur Vale who was eventually my partner in the trucking business, he and I got together. We were fifty/fifty partners in it and started this route of a truck and a trailer with a stainless steel tank on it. I remember when we first started we had a Briggs and Stratton motor with a pump, to pump the milk from the refrigerated tanks that were on the farm into this big tank that...well, it was a tank that was...well, actually when we first started, Bud Fisher let us take an old Brockway truck.

And we hooked it onto this trailer, stainless steel trailer, and we drove around to the farms everyday, picked up every day. Now, it's every other day. But, when we first started, I can remember some of those cold days at the farm when the Briggs and Stratton motor wouldn't start. Dur and I spent a lot of time working on that route. We finally found that we had to...it was a different way of handling milk. We had to measure the milk from the farmer's tank. We had to take a sample of milk to get the butterfat content and so forth, from each tank every day. And the bottles and so forth we used to keep in the front seat at the time until we built different racks on the truck trailer. So it was an interesting field that we did get into. I eventually sold my interest to, at the time, we called the dairy National...Rapid Dairy Transport we called it. And it still is run by Dur's son, his only son, and is still operating today hauling...

LL: From how large a location?

JR: Well, he...he goes all the way down through into Pennsylvania and up into upper New York State every other day pick up.

LL: And where is his...

JR: ...His trucking business is over on Torrington West Street.

LL: Where does he deliver the milk to?

JR: Most of it goes right into the dairies in Hartford. Hartford and then also CMPA. It's scattered all over, New England as far as that goes.

LL: Are there very many of the trucking companies dairy in Connecticut.

JR: Well, there's several. In fact, Louie Longo's sons also have some trucks and also Staebner. You know Ernie Staebner?

LL: Getting up there in a couple of weeks.

JR: Ernie has some trucks you see, that picks up milk. So, that since the first one we started, things have really multiplied...

LL: So did...did this kind of business exist elsewhere? Or was it just starting out all over and they were trying to find...

JR: It was first set up in California and Bud Fisher through National Dairies wanted to start something up here. And so...but Bud was very instrumental in...in getting us two started at it as far as that goes.

LL: I just say because New York has a large dairy industry, too. Would it have started at the same time or...or were you the guinea pigs?

JR: Well, it grew. We...we happened to be the first ones...in this particular area and in the northeast to get started at it. But it grew pretty fast after that. I didn't mean to get away from...

Q No, no that's fine. At the time you talked about the Farm Bureau and you had talked about roads and .we talked about a variety of things related to what happened; within that organization in this...in the country. So, would you start with your earliest thoughts on the Farm Bureau and then we'll work our way forward.

JR: Well, the Farm Bureau played quite a part in my life. It was Farm Bureau and Extension Program were one and the same but as...as Extension grew and as the Farm Bureau grew, they had to separate because of I think it was...

LL: The Hatch Act.

JR: The Hatch Act. That's right. It came about and you couldn't...you'd have to get support and the Farm Bureau couldn't get support through the Hatch Act. I believe that was it. So that we had to separate at that...that time and I remember...

LL: Oh, it was the Smith-Lever Act that formed the Extension service. It was the Hatch Act that prevented us from being involved with anyone who was lobbying.

JR: Exactly. That's true.

LL: Smith-Lever was the funding source.

JR: That's true. I'm glad that you corrected me on that.

LL: No. I...I had it mixed up, I'm sorry.

JR: So, Farm Bureau had to find some way of supporting the organization and they went to the insurance company. I don't remember just what the name of the insurance company was and that's when they split. But, remember at the time, one of our former Presidents, Herm Walters, at the time, had the opportunity to come up as the Director of this insurance company. I remember him first going out to Columbus, Ohio to one of the first meetings with Farm Bureau and this insurance company.

LL: So that was national but meanwhile that was local...they were like local regions?

JR: Right. It all was broken down into Connecticut StateFarm Bureau and certainly all the Counties. Litchfield County in...in our case was very active and I was one of many Presidents that you know, continue on the Farm Bureau work.

I was fortunate to be President for three years. At that time we had some wonderful agents that also was in Extension separate of Farm Bureau, that we worked with very close after we were...after we were separated. So that's...and I can remember the names of Ray Atherton and Ed Smith and, also, Jeff Nye in later years, through that program. And then in the 4-H program, there was many...the first one I remember was Al Mann was our first Litchfield County 4-H Leader. And then came Don Gaylord and...and then of course, we also had Arlene Martin. There's one I've got to remember and I can't think of his name off hand. It was Hank Kerosg and he played a very important part in an children's lives

LL: It might come to you later as we're talking.

JR: Because he was very instrumental in our family and our seven children. They were all in the 4-H Program which was very educational and they always did a good job. So that was more or less, the breakup of Farm Bureau and Extension. But, we still have the Extension, we still have the Farm Bureau but in separate organizations.

LL: Talk about the roads a little bit.

JR: Oh, yes. Getting back to the roads when mother and dad bought the farm. Well, Torrington Street was just a hard dirt road, very narrow. You really had to...you came to a horse and buggy, we had to get off into the ditch and so forth, to go by and this sort of thing. But in the spring of the year I remember, we used to bring milk down to the creamery and so forth, with our two or three cans in the back of a buggy. The mud would be up to the axles and those wheels on those buggies were quite high.

LL: The bottom would go out of the roads.

JR: That's right. The bottom...there was no bottom in it. It was mud. And the Grange, we were very active in the Grange and we...when we were fourteen years old, we always had to join the Grange. And that's when I went in as a member and still continue as a member, They took up the program of getting Connecticut "out of the mud" And that was the national organization, Grange organization that started that program all over the USA, is to get people out of the mud. And that's how the funds were required either through federal legislation and of course, it got into the state legislation too. So...and then now as you know, we have some real good roads in...not only in Connecticut but through New York State and no matter where you go.

LL: It seems from some of the reading I've done that in some parts of the country, getting "out of the mud" created some conflict between the towns and the rural areas as to who was going to pay for it. And so everybody wasn't happy about getting the rural area out of the mud.

JR: That's true.

LL: But did it happen here?

JR: Because...well, it happened. I can remember some instances that happened. See, some of these right of ways were very narrow. When they started widening the road, in some cases they had to take some land from different farmers to widen the road. But in this case, as far as Torrington is concerned, the right of way was from stone wall to stone wall which was quite wide. So they didn't have that problem but yes, some of the towns had a problem losing land because of widening the roads.

LL: And did local people, like when you had got electricity you had to pay for your own poles and that's...I think that's how they moved out. With the roads, did you have to pay for your own road frontage?

JR: You know, I don't remember that. That's something I don't remember but I remember the towns played a part into it and eventually our taxes were affected, so I'm sure the property owners did...did pay their share I'm sure.

LL: When you...now let's...I'm going to go back to your dairy herd for a while. Where did you grow the feed for your...did you have the sufficient land to grow or did you have to buy it?

JR: Well, most of our land was right around the area here and we produced all our feed except for the grains, like com and wheat and oats and things like that. We bought those by the hundred pounds through our farm feed agent. Of course, now they have the Blue Seals and the Agways and things like that. But we...we bought...we took care of most of our roughage, hay and insulate, com silage we grew pretty much locally. If we didn't have enough land we rented from another farm and this sort of thing. but our grains we bought.

LL: And then during that season when you were clearing your fields, did crews...did your neighbors or crews go from farm to farm or were they pretty much they...people did their own farms?

JR: Well, most...most of us...of course, when the balers came out baling hay and so forth, I was one of the first ones to have a baler. We did "custom work we", call it. Going from you know, to different smaller farms that couldn't afford a baler. So we did share that in many cases.

LL: How much did your first baler cost, do you remember?

JR: I remember it was a...a Number 76 New Holland Baler. It was the heaviest piece of machinery that we ever bough, but I can't remember what we paid for it hut it was expensive. I know that. It was a few years paying it off you know, like most of...

LL: In what year would that have been approximately?

JR: Oh, golly, I can't remember exactly but it's going back...it's going back forty-five, fifty years.

LL: Would you also talk about the town connections you had? You eventually ended up in the State Legislature. Did you get into politics through town politics first or did you just make a quantum leap?

JR: Well, I got into town politics first. I happened to go on the Board of Safety in Torrington which controls the Police Department and Fire Department. Along those years being on the outside it was...we had the volunteer fire departments and so forth. I was a charter member of Burrville Fire Department and then charter member of Torrington Fire Department. Then with that connection I felt that I could play a part on the Board of Safety and I went for the Board of Safety and I got on. And then they controlled the Police Department and the Fire Departments. That was my first step as far as politics is concerned. Then I joined the Republican Town Committee in Torrington and I've been on that committee ever since. In 1973 was appointed Dep. Com of agriculture where received for three years. There was an opening in the Sixty-fourth District in the state which had seven different towns. Going west to Goshen, Cornwall, Canaan, Kent, Sharon, Warren & Tomptson. There seven towns at that time and I represented the Sixty-fourth District and held that seat for twelve years in the General Assembly which was six, two year terms.

LL: What years would that have been? Early '60's?

JR: Years...years go by...no it was in the middle '80's. So, no, I got out in '92 so I guess it was '80. 1980. But I found that very interesting working on Environment. Committee which controls agricultural and, also, on Transportation which I was very much interested with a lot of the town roads and state roads and appropriations and so forth. So I was on that committee and found it very interesting because I was in the minority with four farmers in the State General Assembly at the time. You know, Jack Tiffany and John Savage and John Modarski and myself at that time but I always say that I've learned by doing and that in itself in the General Assembly was quite an education. And I do appreciate that very much.

LL: What do you think was the biggest challenge facing you as you ran your agricultural business?

JR: Of course, financing was...was a big challenge. You had to get financing and I did that through Farm Credit. Now the Farm Credit Organization...

LL: Is that Pioneer Farm Credit?

JR: No. No, this was...well, it was different areas. This was...happened to be the Litchfield County Farm Credit but eventually was state and their main office was in ---in Rocky Hill. It was the time the General Manager was Sterling Fayre. Fair Sterling came to me one day and he asked me if I'd be interested in becoming a Director. For seventeen years I was a Director in Farm Credit and I thank this to Sterling Fayre and Farm Credit. You see the Farm Credit system is set up with three different banks. It's the Federal Land Bank which contains the land and then the Production Credit Association is your, well, production in dairying or vegetable, broken down into a short term loan.

LL: Like a seasonal kind of thing.

JR: That's right. And they called it a short term loan and the Farm Credit was the long term thirty year farm mortgage. And then the third branch of the organization was the Cooperative. Cooperative Farm Credit. And that's how the farmers like or the coops from, like Agway and in this case CMPA, got their money through the Farm Credit through the Cooperative part of the organization.

LL: And so that was...where is that home company nationally?

JR: Well, it's...it's a national organization at this time but most of it's set up in this case, our main bank is in Springfield, Springfield Bank. So that the...was an education within itself. We used to have Board meetings, Farm Board meetings and farmers used to come in and we'd have to interview 'em for loans and things like that so...

LL: And this was for the whole State of Connecticut too?

JR: This was for the State of Connecticut and it grew up into New Hampshire and Massachusetts so it was very much interest...and that's how farmers got started. You know, people had the opportunity, and we used to enjoy meeting some of the younger farmers that had an idea they wanted to be a farmer and they got loans. And we stretched our neck out quite far in some cases and we did well. You know, we didn't have too many bad loans you know, that...but farmers always helped one another and I think that...

LL: This would have been in what year did you start then? Approximately.

JR: It was back into the '60's. I was Director seventeen years and that which I...I really think helped out a lot of the younger farmers that were coming along, and some of the older ones that needed money. That's how they got big and got their heavy equipment. The farmers had to change from the horses to the

tractors and the bigger equipment. This is how it happened.

LL: One of the big problems out in the midwest was when they took on too much debt and then things began to collapse. We didn't have as big a problem here?

JR: No, well farmers were a little smaller and they controlled you know, their units a little...little tighter than some of the bigger farms out west. Some of them grew too fast. There's such a thing as growing too fast. And some...some of the younger farmers...I know we had...they'd always want a bigger tractor. They'd want you know, somebody had a fifty horsepower tractor, they'd want a seventy-five or a hundred and you'd have to discourage them from that point. Especially in the east here where the farmers were smaller. You know, you could do pretty much with a fifty rather than a hundred horsepower. We had to discourage a lot of those people from buying something that they couldn't really afford in the first place so...it was interesting.

LL: The Yankee frugality way back. Talk about...you said your wife became a good farm wife. What did she do? When she learned the farming system so that...I can't remember exactly what you said.

JR: My wife kept the books and she was a good bookkeeper and certainly held the money and so forth. She knew how to get the bargains forth and she also sewed like most farm people did. (She was laying down and I think maybe I can get her to come down.)

LL: We're to the end of this side of the tape so we'll...okay.

JR: Oh, I see.

LL: I wanted to talk about what were some of the...what was your greatest satisfaction with what you've done?

JR: (Actually, I hear her moving around now) but my...my...there's many really. In Farm Credit and certainly in the organization, the Farm Bureau, in Extension Program, the 4-H Program, all of those things?

(End of side one.)

All of those things were...were a challenge within itself. I don't think I can really pick out one. Of course, the biggest one is raising the family and so forth. Which we were very proud of.

LL: What do you think made you decide to go into dairy rather than poultry? What was there about the dairy that intrigued you?

JR: Well, I think...there again, I think it was the 4-H Program that...

(Tape interruption.)

LL: ...group of women friends were no different because you were all active.

B: Right. In both church, 4-H, Grange...

LL: Grange and Farm Bureau?

B: Farm Bureau.

LL: What kin...how... what kinds of things did Farm Bureau do then while your kids were growing up?

B: The Farm Bureau wasn't a...wasn't for the children really. You know, 4-H was...was the activity of the...for the children. But we had an active 4-H Women's Group. I'm sorry, we had an active Farm Bureau Women's Group.

LL: And that differed in parts of the state or is that the statewide?

B: Yeah, we had County Women's Farm Bureau groups I think I was Chairman of it at one time. And don't tell Mark all this. But we did a lot of things. We had...we had meetings where we would suggest how to redesign your kitchens as well as meetings where you learned different kinds of cookery. This is a separate women's group.

LL: Yes.

B: This was not just the regular quarterly or yearly --- of the Farm Bureau that the women's group met at.

LL: And the Grange was more of a social group?

B: Yes, it probably was. We had fund raising suppers and we had agricultural parades. We did many, many suppers. There was a great hall right next door and it burned when the church burned but... Of course, it wasn't as easy to get to town so the grange took the place of the movies. Although we had theaters in town at that time, but a lot of our activities were with the Grange and the Grange had a youth organization, too. The Juvenile Grange. Very active one in this area 'cause we had a lot of children up here.

LL: Was your family unique in having seven children?

B: No. No.

LL: You mentioned before we went on...on this that you weren't as isolated as some parts were of...because you were near town. When you talk with women from other parts of the state, do they feel more isolated?

B: No, I just felt they were if they lived in Colebrook or. Salisbury

LL: I've been up there too. (Laughter)

B: Or Sharon. There was no...no town of any size nearby. And we had that advantage.

LL: Did you shop in Winsted? Is that where you did your grocery shopping?

B: No, Torrington.

LL: You shopped in Torrington.

B: Yep.

LL: Did you have your own home garden for of...as the kids were growing up?

B: Yes. Um hmm. Yes, we did. I didn't grow up on a farm. But I soon learned gardening and canning and sewing

LL: Where was your home?

B: I grew up in Torrington.

LL: All right.

B: But I...I didn't have a farm background and I had to learn how to can and then freeze. There's Farm Bureau meeting, Women's meetings came in. Before Marriage was very active in include organization, on the GMCA receiver team, a leader, a give scout leader & one of 13 give to learned the golden eagle badge

LL: What did your parents think when you moved to the country?

B: I don't know. (Laughter)

LL: They never said.

B: No, I don't know.

JR: No, they were good parents. Of course, they were supportive...

B: As I say, they weren't that far away.

LL: How did you meet?

B: At the Grange. And my, now, sister-in-law married to Joe's brother Eddie, was a school friend of mine and we also worked together. So then she became involved with Eddie and she became involved with the Grange and she said, "Why don't you come to the Grange. They have nice dances as well as good meetings" So...

LL: And where were working at the time?

B: We both worked at the Torrington Company.

LL: Now you mentioned your kids being active when they were in school with teens and in school and with the Y and so forth. But your oldest didn't feel as active.

B: He was. That was...that was...that's just our family joke.

LL: My oldest daughter talks the same way. (Laughter)

B: Well, I don't think Mark ever was as involved in...the others were all on the swim teams and Mark maybe wasn't that interested in swimming. He had the chance 'cause he went to the Y. They all went to the Y, that's...

LL: Did you do the shuttle service back and forth to town?

B: See, that's where we had an advantage. We had a lot of families going to the same thing, so we

shared.

LL: What kind of canning did you do? What did you can?

B: Oh, at that time we canned almost anything. We canned vegetables and...and fruit. Beans I remember not with pleasure. Picking 'em and canning... But of course, then everything was freezing after that. And now we go to the store and get it off the shelf... for two people.

LL: What do you think was your biggest challenge moving out to the ---? And how did you...how did you start getting into the bookkeeping for what be...basically it was a family business? In between children. (Laughter)

B: Yeah. Well, because probably that was more my background. I...I did bookkeeping and I was comfortable with that. It the Torrington company for my father's tracking business. And that was...that was easier than going to the bam most likely, too.

LL: Mark must have...even Mark was ---. (Laughter)

JR: I never...never wanted her in the barn.

B: Well, I offered once.

JR: I know but I was...I always thought that a woman's place is in the home... But they think different today and I think girls like the barn.

LL: We have a lot of Ag majors that are female. I mean, fifty/fifty. Decisions. How...how were decisions made? As...as a business partnership? You made the ones about the dairy and you made the ones about the house? How did you make your decisions?

B: Probably. I don't know how to say this because I think everybody was in the same situation. You...you took care of the necessary expenses and then what was left over was fine if there was anything left over. Most of us lived with our mortgage over our heads in order to buy more cows or more land. It was a long time before things were so that you didn't have to balance quite as...well, I mean, it worked out.

LL: But if you're keeping books for the business; She could have been playing with the books.

B: Um hmm. (Laughter)

LL: Well, I'm just thinking about as your decisions relied on her knowledge.

JR: I thought most...

B: Of what was there.

JR: I think most of our decision were mutual you know. We both decided...we came down to...

B: This is what's in the books. This is what's there. How are we going to...

JR: Pay for it.

B: ...divide it? But the first thing you had to do was make your payments. After that you know...

JR: Well, it wasn't always easy but..

B: I suppose not, didn't seem difficult at the time.

LL: What do you think was the most fun living in a world...farm situation? I don't mean fun, but satisfying.

B: You had more freedom than you thought, at the time. I mean, you could...you could take the day off if you wanted to. You know you didn't have to go to the factory or down to work if you really wanted Monday off instead a weekend. You could...freedom. Nothing to compare by.

LL: Do you have sisters or brothers?

B: No, I had one brother but he's dead.

LL: Was he ever involved in agriculture?

B: No. My father had a trucking business and he had inherited that. I used to do my father's books. So...

LL: Any other memories you have about working...being involved with Farm Bureau the State organization? How is it...how was it organized locally? The Women's Group met separately. Was it...

B: Sometimes we met separately.

LL: Was it really structured...was it a structured women's subgroup? And you decided what you were going to have on your programs and stuff?

B: Right, yeah. Well, they...there was a State group and then there were County organizations. And we met separately from ---Farm Bureau. So somewhere I'm sure I have a lot of minutes of those meetings.

LL: That would be very nice to...well, your husband showed what you had pulled out. I haven't had a chance to look at them but you have you know...

B: But you know...probably there are in the Farm Bureau magazines --- if you pull those out, there must be something, articles about the Women's Committee too. I don't know whatever happened to that. I guess it...things change. We didn't work so we could have meetings in the afternoon. Most women work now. I mean, work off the farm.

LL: So, did the Farm Bureau meetings include things on raising children?

B: I'm sure they did. I'm sure we had programs on that.

LL: We've already talked about I...I was a Home Ec teacher in my previous life.

B: We have a daughter that is. No, she is not, now, but she was a Home Economics teacher.

LL: Thank you very, very much.

B: It's...it's funny. When she was still teaching up in...up in Lexington. One of her classes she thought they should have the experience of going out of the classroom and out into the wood. So they went out and they had a program or a picnic or cookout or something but she didn't know that she'd gone too far into the woods and she was no longer on the school property. So she had a little problem with that but she said, "These children don't know anything about being outside." They know nothing about food and animals...and that was back twenty years ago. That's why she doesn't do that with them anymore, but she doesn't really have Home Ec. They have a new...

LL: Family Consumer Sciences.

B: Probably.

LL: And then they have, it's called...Connecticut has a new name and National has a new name for it. I think it's Family Consumer Sciences. And then they call it Family...

B: It's a very strange name and what she teaches...I said, "That doesn't sound like Home Ec to me." But it's what's in the curriculum now. So...

LL: Thank you very much for taking the time, all of a sudden, there.

B: Okay, okay.

(Tape interruption.)

LL: ...about your kids.

B: Well, today these children have all kinds of opportunities that we never heard of. But back when our children were growing up in the '60's, I think their 4-H background gave them the opportunity to go places outside of the school system that other children didn't have. You know, they went to...I told you they all went to the National conferences and that was a big thing...

LL: In Chicago.

B: And that was...you know, you had to go to the State...State level. No you had to go to the County level and particularly with the girls, it was dress revue and then the State level and then you were, if you were lucky, selected to go to...to the National Conference. And that was a big thing for young people at that time.

LL: Do I remember seeing any of your children as IYFE iff. Did anything...I have gotten old IYFE files from back through the '50's.

B: Yeah, didn't you have one here?

LL: I haven't looked at them yet, no.

B: ...or didn't you...oh. Berth Marie and Mark. Oh, you must... You might run into that girl too. She was when an IFYE when Marie was. Marie was IFYE. She was our oldest daughter. The others went on rural exchanges within the country, Kansas and the southwest and then they also went on a farm trip to England. Jean went to England. These things are not uncommon, now, but they were quite uncommon at that time. Mark was in the Peace Corps for two years too, in Brazil.

LL: Had he gone IFYE? What do you think prompted him to in the Peace Corps?

B: Owen Trask.

LL: Oh.

JR: Remember Owen? Owen Trask?

LL: I've only heard of him.

B: Mark had just...just begun his first semester at UConn. And they were looking for a 4-H Peace Corps project. Project with 4-Hers. And Owen had been close to the County and knew Mark quite well. Mark had been, you know, an intern in some of the programs that the 4-H had. So he approached Mark and he said, "Why don't you forget...you should forget school and you should go into this program." Mark was only eighteen years old you know...and this was...

JR: Just turned eighteen.

B: This was a big decision to make to leave for two year. So he thought about it and I guess he talked to Hank Kritzer, too, who was our County agent He signed up and he said, "You know, this...this won't be so bad. I've had two years of Spanish. I'll be fine." Of course, he got to Brazil and they didn't speak Spanish, they speak Portuguese and he did not know the language. So he was down there not knowing the language but he learned a lot in two years. He can tell you that.

LL: Portuguese...I was looking at a thing the other day and it comes from the Italic languages. Latin base, Portuguese.

B: Yeah, it's a...it's a...

LL: I didn't know this until a few days ago.

B: And anyway he had...

LL: Immersion.

B: In fact he reminded me and I don't know why he was talking to his girls, and he said, "Yeah, did you know that your grandmother went out and gave talks about the 4-H Program, the 4-H Peace Corps in Brazil?" And they looked at him. He would send home slides and he'd send home letters about what he was doing down there. that time, the Peace Corps was very new. So I would go to the Grange and the school, the PTO and talk about the Peace Corps in Brazil as I knew it, or as I heard about it. Well, anyway, people were interested because it was something different. So he...and we had some good experiences.

LL: What kind of projects did he work on when he was in Brazil?

B: I don't know. You'll have to ask him. Agriculture, yeah. Trying to teach them modern agriculture. I remember sending him...I remember...

(Tape interruption.)

We had at the time he was in Brazil, we had an IFYE iffy from Argentina here. A girl and she was so homesick. We would tell her that you know, we had a son that was far away also and that we understood. She was...she was very good. She was a...they were...the IFYES that really got into the program and some of them that just didn't want to be so far from home. But this girl was fine.

LL: When they're sixteen/seventeen, that's when the IFYE's about that age. That's a..

B: Yeah, it was...

JR: Good step for her.

LL: Yes, it really is at her age.

JR: When Mark went away you know, he went away a boy and came back a man.

B: Yeah, but he went...he went for two years marine was in the IFTY program... the iffy is usually a six-month program or something. It's more --- what she brought back other than the language, of course, that was Spanish, was an interest that she still has in weaving and textiles. But she doesn't have much time for it now but at one time she did a lot of weaving. She appreciated the crafts and the handwork that they...most people do. I can't think of much else that they...but those things were a result of their farm back home.

LL: And lots of support---from home too. To have...before they drive to get them back and forth to meetings. It's a commitment by a family too. Were you a 4-H Leader?

B: No. No. Only a...

JR: In the Grange they have youth...

B: Juvenile Grange. Yeah, we had...I was Matron of the Juvenile Grange for a while. 4-H I just... was a helper

(Tape interruption.)

LL: Well, then talk about the biggest change that you experienced that you think during the time you were running your business in agriculture.

JR: Well, I had had a couple of different changes you know. I was farming and then I went into American Brass and learned apprenticeship. That was a big change for me being inside away from being outside. And that was a big change for me.

B: Joe, did you look at any of these?

JR: No, we haven't yet. I don't...

B: This is poultry that's why.

LL: Okay.

JR: Then I had a farm accident and it cut off all these fingers and it's...didn't have much use of this whole hand for a while. That was a big change for me and I did sell farm fertilizers and farm chemicals at the time. That was a big change for me for a while. But I got over it and I can do most anything today as

far as that goes but it did...that was a change for me. I still had income but I still had to hire somebody to take my place on the farm so I could do something else. So I went on the road to sell farm chemicals and farm grains.

LL: With one company or did you put together your own...?

JR: No, I worked for a while at that time it was the Hubbard-Hall Chemical. They sold all kinds of different chemicals. Not only farm chemicals but industrial chemicals. I took over the farm end of it. And because I was connected with the farms at that time anyway.

LL: And how large of a geographic area did you...?

JR: Well, it was all of Litchfield County and then up into Sheffield which is Massachusetts and that area. So I was on the road for a while. It was a big change for me because...and I learned by doing you know, as far as selling is concerned. I never sold anything before except what I produced on the farm. That was just natural as far as milk was concerned. That was a big change. And then the big change of course, when we got married and we had the family. That was a big move. We built the house. We lived in the little...little house here which is now the garage until we had three children and...and then we had to build a bigger house so we built this seven room house and tore down a barn, put the frame up and...and that's...that's what we have today. And I'd do it over again, everything. I wouldn't change a thing.

LL: So what do you think your biggest love is for, for this kind of lifestyle?

JR: Well, it's a...it's the only way to raise a family in my mind. Because they have a...have an active part in the business that you are running. They have their chores to do. They didn't get into after school problems, which they have today. They learned in doing things.

LL: That were real things.

JR: That were real things.

LL: Interesting.

JR: Milking cows, plowing, knew how to drive horses and change from the horse age to the tractor age and mechanical machinery that had to...just had to be, because of the production that you had to come up with on the farm in order to survive. So they saw all that and they fit in their education in between the lines. So...no, I think those are the big things that...

LL: What did the Legislature...because we have, actually some large areas of the state that are rural but there are only four, considered rural legislators. What are some options that these people might face or how can...I guess not that but how can the rural communities...

JR: Survive?

LL: Yeah.

JR: Well, getting back to the General Assembly in...in you know, the early days, there was a representative from every town. That was the history. Every town had a member in the General Assembly so they had a hundred and sixty-nine. But today, it's all a popularity contest, I call it. And you know, anyone can run and a lot of them are of course, lawyers today. I have nothing against lawyers but I think you've got to have more of a balance in the General Assembly. You got to have farm folks, you got to have...we got to have lawyers, you got to have doctors and certainly down to earth working people. Come

up with a balance in the General Assembly. It's...it's sometimes scary when you get too many lawyers or too many...at one point there were probably too many farmers, too. But I think that they've got to review that some to get a more of a balance. How they're going to do it, I don't know. You see my point?

LL: I do. And in fact, that's kind of the basis behind this project is to look at issues facing...and I started out thinking agriculture, but it's actually issues facing communities as they make the decisions about what they're going to look like in the future.

JR: Yeah, you take your open space and of course...

LL: There's economics and business of the farms and it's...meanwhile...

JR: Yeah, industry. Of course, industry is pretty popular in our state. It's going back...oh, going back, the first industry was agriculture. And now of course, it's building airplanes and Pratt & Whitneys and United Technology and all that.

You got to take and...and of course, Connecticut is number one as far as industry is concerned and on all those things. Science.

LL: Is there anything else you'd like to add? We've talked about...well, we started talking about your wife's role before and then she came to...

JR: Yeah, I'm glad she did. She sometimes kind of hard to get going but she can really tell some...some...bring out some good points on some of the things. No, certainly I'd like to thank you very much for taking on a chore such as you have and it must be interesting for you with...

LL: It is...it really is.

JR: How many have you interviewed?

LL: I've done thirty-five.

JR: Thirty-five.

LL: I was going to do twenty and I've done thirty-five and I probably have about ten or fifteen more eventually that I will do. Thank you very much.

(End of Interview)