Q: This is Luane Lange interviewing Phil Colgan who is the manager of Sugar Hill Farm. Thank you very much for agreeing to do this Phil.

A: Sure.

Q: Would you start by talking about where you were born?

A: Sheverly, Maryland.

Q: Sheverly, Maryland. And was it in agriculture on a farm?

A: No, no. I was only little, there, and then we moved to Massachusetts to a farm.

Q: And you grew up there?

A: Greenfield, yeah.

Q: You grew up on a farm in Greenfield. How long did you live there?

A: 'Til I was fifteen.

Q: When did you come to Connecticut?

A: When I was fifteen, we came up here. We just had a small place up here.

Q: It was a farm, small farm?

A: Yeah, a small farm.
Q: How many acres.
A: Oh, there’s only...we raised rabbits and whatnot. But then, I went to work on a farm so...
Q: All right. Where did you go to school, high school?
A: I didn’t...quit in ninth grade.
Q: Some of my family didn’t either. So then when you went to work on a farm, was it near your home?
A: Yes.
Q: And had you worked there before, summers or something?
A: No. I just got the job and went there.
Q: And what did you do?
A: Oh, milk cows and fed calves and everything.
Q: How big was that farm?
A: Oh, it was about fifty cows, fifty milkers.
Q: And what year would that have been? Approximately.
Q: At the time, would that farm...how large was that? I mean, did people think of that as a large farm?
A: Probably an average maybe, yeah, for the area.
Q: And what town was that near?
A: That was in Harwinton.
Q: Harwinton. And, were there other people who worked on that farm, too?
A: There was just the owner at that time.
Q: ‘Cause milking fifty cows twice a day?
A: Um hmm.

Q: That's a lot. You had milking machines?

A: Um hmm.

Q: Did the barn have stanchions?

A: Yes, stanchion barn, yeah.

Q: Did the cows have names?

A: Yeah, the cows had names, yeah.

Q: Did they ever change the kind of milking that they did in the way of having loose housing or a milking parlor or anything?

A: No, this was...this was an older...older man and things stayed the same.

Q: Whatever happened to that farm?

A: Ended up finally getting developed you know, sold off for...

Q: Did he get old and decided to develop it or was he deceased and the family developed it?

A: Yeah, he deceased and the family developed it.

Q: So then what did you do? Did you stay there until he...he died?

A: No, I went to work in a body shop for a while and then...then I went back on another farm in Harwinton. Then he moved up to Maine and I went up there with him.

Q: He bought another farm in Maine? Sold the one in Harwinton?

A: He just rented the one in Harwinton.

Q: He rented it out or he had just rented it before.

A: He used to rent that farm in Harwinton and then he bought a farm up in Maine. He bought a farm where we milked a hundred cows in a stanchion barn.

Q: The farm in Harwinton, how large was that? The one where he rented?
A: It was about fifty cows too.

Q: And who owned it? Where were those owners?
A: Hooper... Hoopers owned it.

Q: Where were they?
A: They lived there and he ended up marrying their daughter.

Q: Oh, I see. So he went on to manage their farm basically or he was employed there? He leased it from them.
A: Right.

Q: Had they ever farmed?
A: Yes. Oh, yeah.

Q: Were they of the age to go into some other kind of work and then leased it to him...?
A: No, no. They were too old. Yeah, he came down to the farm, helped out and so on and stuff.

Q: He had lived in the area?
A: Yeah.

Q: So then eventually, he married their daughter and then they moved to Maine. They bought a farm in Maine?
A: Um hmm.

Q: And you followed them there?
A: Yes.

Q: What kind of a farm did they have? Was it all dairy?
A: Dairy, all dairy.

Q: So they went from fifty cows to a hundred cows?
A: Um hmm.
Q: How long were you there?
A: About three years.

Q: And you returned to Connecticut then?
A: Yeah, I returned to Connecticut and then I went out west for a while. I sort of traveled around. When I was young.

Q: Sure. Did you work at...at ranches or farms out west or were you just traveling?
A: A buddy and I went out in a pickup truck, made a homemade camper and put on the back and a '56 Dodge I had. And we went out and we were pretty broke when we got out in Oklahoma. We saw these people haying on the side of the road and we were gonna take the camper off and help them hay. They sort of laughed at us 'cause they had tractor trailers that they used and stuff like that. I worked there for oh, probably two years for those people.

Q: Now how is that different than from out here?
A: Hay?

Q: Yeah.
A: Well, there's nice flat fields, no stones or nothing and you know, things were done in a bigger way, you know.

Q: You said they used tractor trailers for haying. What do you mean?
A: Well, they...they'd hay the field and you'd bring the hay to the tractor trailer, load the tractor trailer and then they'd sell the hay. You know, deliver it somewhere and sell it.

Q: So it was baled right there in the fields?
A: Um hmm.

Q: Where did they sell it? Did they ship it any distances or did they sell it locally?
A: Most of it locally. You know, sell it to dairy farmers and what not.

Q: How big was that farm, in acres?
A: Well, they didn't just do that farm. They...they hayed other peoples...
Q: They leased other farms too?
A: Yeah.
Q: Oh, oh. Did they contract with other farms?
A: Right. They...they just...
Q: Or did they lease other land to hay...to grow hay?
A: You know, I'm not even positive whether they...They probably either leased it or you know, some of them I think they...We also just did their hay and put it in their barns. Stuff like that.
Q: Sure. I just learned about this, about contracting, the people have equipment then they go around and cut...
A: Right, right.
Q: Did your friend stay out there, too, for the two years?
A: Yeah, he stayed but he didn't end up staying working for them. He...he came back.
Q: What was different about working on a farm out there than here? Was there a difference in the number of people who worked for them or where you lived or how you got paid? Was there any difference between New England and Oklahoma?
A: There was more friendlier type people I think, you know. Up here in New England there isn’t down to earth type people I found.
Q: Interesting, interesting. So then, when did you come back? Did you come back immediately from Oklahoma or did you travel some more?
A: Oh, I kept going.
Q: My son went to see...driving across in his van and ended up in Seattle; never has come back.
A: I went up to Minnesota and I worked on a pig farm up there. And I stayed there for I’d say about a year.
Q: How did you happen to go from Oklahoma to Minnesota?
A: Oh, I met somebody down there. I used to help him out once in a while and stuff like that. They ended up moving up to Minnesota so...

Q: They also changed farms?

A: They owned their farm and they sold the farm there and they went up to Minnesota and raised pigs.

Q: Had they raised pigs in Oklahoma?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did they go to a different size farm in Minnesota with their pigs?

A: Well, actually they bou...the ended up buying two farms because they were, I don’t know, they were a lot cheaper.

Q: In Minnesota?

A: Yeah.

Q: How many pigs did they have in Oklahoma and then how many pigs did they raise in Minnesota?

A: Oh boy. I’d say, sows, they probably had like forty-fifty sows.

Q: In Oklahoma?

A: In Oklahoma. Then when they went up to Minnesota, they probably had oh I don’t know how many. It was more than that but I wouldn’t say it was a hundred.

Q: What about in acreage? Did they increase a lot in acreage?

A: Oh yeah. Can’t remember the name of the town we lived in.

Q: That’s all right. Then where did you go? You’d been there a couple of years.

A: Um hmm. Then I came back to Connecticut again. I ended up...I leased a farm in Connecticut. And I used to...I worked for a contractor here doing roads and hydroseeding and stuff like that and I started up my own farm. First I took care of someone else’s heifers and I got paid to take care of their heifers.

Q: On the farm that you leased, you raised someone else’s heifers?

A: Right.
Q: Let me ask. Where were those people, the one whose heifers you raised?

A: He milked cows. He was in Cornwall, Connecticut and he just wanted somebody to take care of the heifers so he could spend more time with his cows, around that, you know. Plus, he didn’t have a big enough barn. So, I ended up taking care of his and then built up a...I bought calves and built up a small herd. I went to work for him when the farm got sold that...that I was leasing. ‘Went to work for him and when he bought another farm in Goshen, I ran that and brought my cows there. ‘Just kept building up enough and I got machinery and whatnot and...

Q: Now were you still working with the contractor at the same time?

A: Once...once I stopped leasing that farm, then I went to work just for him.

Q: Where was the original farm you leased? Was that in Cornwall as well?

A: The farm I leased was in Bakerville. New Hartford, part of New Hartford.

Q: So now you’re in...

A: Goshen. That was a free stall effort, that was a different type barn.

Q: Would you describe free stall?

A: Free stalls were...it’s a lot easier to take care of them because you do most of the stuff with the machines instead of with a wheelbarrow or whatever. You feed them their corn silage or whatever down through in a stanchion barn. Where in a free stall, you just go with a chuck wagon down through and you feed it into a bunker and then...

Q: You need to tell what a chuck wagon is and a bunker please?

A: A bunker is just a big cement thing that...it’s like a trough and you auger the feed into that. And...

Q: Does this go down the center of the barn?

A: Yes. It goes down the center. There’s a door at each end so you can just go through the track.

Q: And the cattle are not in stanchions are they?

A: No, they’re...they’re free stall. They just walk in and they lay down in stalls like.

Q: They have their own little cubicle?
A: You just have a holding pen which holds them in there. Then you just let...we had eight come in at one time, four on each side. Milking parlor they call it. They come in and sort of get locked in a spot and stand there until you throw the machines on and milk 'em.

Q: Uh. Hmm. Does...is this stationary, this milking platform? Or does it move?

A: No, it’s stationary. You’re done, they walk back out and you put four more in it...

Q: Do they have their own stalls? Or, do they just wander in at different...

A: No, they just go anywhere.

Q: Interesting because when I was little, I went on my cousin’s dairy farm and the cows seemed to know where their stanchions were.

A: The stanchion barn, yes. But a free stall, no.

Q: Yeah, ‘cause that was an interest to me. How did they know where to go?

A: You have to teach ‘em in a stanchion barn. Yeah, you have to teach ‘em and sometimes that’s a little difficult for a while, you know? They always have a particular stanchion they go into.

Q: Why?

A: I don’t know. A lot of times...well, it’s easier. It’s gets to be too hard to just let ‘em in and let ‘em try to find one. And, plus, you got you know, behind in stanchion barns you used to have the records of the cows hanging up behind them and how much milk they made and what their name was and...and if they had to be treated or anything, everything was right there. So it was a lot easier to do it that way if...if you had ‘em, to get somebody to come in and milk for you. If you wanted to go somewhere or something, you know?

Q: Interesting. Okay, so now what happened after you were in Goshen? You were there how long at that...on that person’s farm? You had your own place. Then you took your herd to his farm in Goshen?

A: In Goshen, I left Goshen with my cows and...and I built up my equipment and stuff like that so that I...At this point I didn’t...I didn’t owe anybody any money and I owned all my own cows. When I left there I think I had about twenty or twenty-five milking or something like that, you know? And...

Q: And what kind of equipment did you have?
A: Right on the side and then when you clean the barn, it's the same thing. You just take a scraper and scrape it and push it off into a pit which was a liquid manure pit type thing.

Q: So the barn is built so that the waste drains out of these stalls?

A: No. No, you have to pull it out of the stalls and you end up...just sand in the stalls is what's in the stalls.

Q: Oh, all right. I see.

A: And then if they do their thing in the stalls, you just pull that out into the laneway and you scrape everything out. Some people put it directly into a manure spreader and take it out in the field and spread it and some people have ponds.

Q: Now the cows are...they get to go out into another building to be milked?

A: They go...go in...yes.

Q: Or out to an addition onto that?
A: I had a small tractor and a baler and rake, tedder.

Q: What's a tedder?

A: It fluffs the hay up so that it dries.

Q: Okay.

A: You cut it first. I had a haybine. You cut it first and then you let the top dry and then you ted it and then you ted it again if it needs tedding again. Then you rake it and then you bale it. But back then I...I didn't have a baler with a kicker or anything. I used to go out and load 'em up at night or whatever because when...when I first started and whatnot, it was kind of tough, even then. I ended up getting a loan and buying a bigger tractor and a few more better pieces of equipment. We used to milk two times a day and I went to three times a day. So you ran out of hours during the day to do a lot of stuff. It was...there was my wife and myself and we hired my nephew there at one point and it just...it was a lot of work. You...a lot of hours, lot of hours. Used to get up you know, you'd have 'em on a three...three times a day so you'd break that up and try to get the haying done. Many times you're out there at night at eleven, twelve o'clock picking the bales up.

Q: How many acres of hay did it take to...to support that many cows?

A: Well, I think I milked about just over forty. Between forty and forty-five and...

Q: Did you rely on only your own feed or did you have to buy...?

A: No, no, only my own. I raised corn and hay.

Q: On how many acres?

A: Of corn and hay? I had grazing land too.

Q: Oh, oh. All right. How many acres were needed to support your herd?

A: Well, that farm wasn't big enough so I had to rent more land you know? So probably...probably had about eighty acres, something like that.

Q: You leased that land. You leased the farm where you lived and you leased the extra land you needed.

A: Right, right. I ended up...the guy had a greenhouse on the same place and I ended up leasing the greenhouse from him too. You almost made more on the greenhouse than you did on the cows.
Q: What did you raise in the greenhouse?
A: Flowers, vegetables you know.

Q: Did you have any outside gardens, too, to raise vegetables?
A: Yeah, I raised pumpkins and raised a garden for ourself.

Q: And what then happened? What did you do next?
A: Well again, that farm got sold.

Q: Um hmm. And each time they got sold, I forgot to ask you, the people who owned them then...like the first one you said, were deceased. Another one moved to a larger farm. The people who bought these farms, did they move into the farm eventually and farm them or did they buy them and continue to lease them to other people? Like this one, did the people who bought it change then who they wanted to lease it to or did they start farming?
A: Nobody farmed these to make a living on after that. The New Hartford one, he came in and he just liked to raise a few animals you know, for himself or whatever, like cows. Now his is up for sale, too.

Q: Was he what they would have in the past called a “gentleman farmer” Did he work someplace else?
A: Yeah, his father owned a business and he worked the business. But, he always liked to get his hands into farming, you know? Sometimes when you get that in your blood, you can’t get it out. Sometimes I think you should but...you make more money on other stuff, you know?

Q: So he was off-farm income and this was...he wanted to live on a farm but he didn’t farm it?
A: Right, to make a living or anything, no.

Q: And what about this next one, in Goshen?
A: In Goshen? That one ended up getting sold and a horse farmer bought it.

Q: So it went from dairy to horses?
A: Right.

Q: Is that still there, do you know?
A: It's still there and it still has...they board horses there. There’s a lot more money in boarding horses than there is milking cows.

Q: Who do these horses belong to?

A: Mostly someone that just wants to go riding and they don’t have a place at their house or whatever.

Q: How far do people commute to board their horses? Where do these people live?

A: I’d say twenty...twenty, thirty miles, as much as.

Q: And then this farm...this farm has trails and so on?

A: No, that farm is not very big. I think that farm only had like thirty, forty acres on that farm. So I mean, they have riding rings. You know, they...a lot of people board a horse so that they can have it there for their daughter or whatever you know, so they can learn how to ride.

Q: And then after they learn to ride they enter competitions and so on?

A: Right, yeah.

Q: Okay, then what happened after they sold that farm? What did you do next?

A: Oh, we were thinking about going to New York and we decided to just get out of farming. So I just...I sold everything off and I went back to work for the contractor.

Q: What year would that have been approximately? We’re into the ‘80’s?

A: I’d say yeah, ‘83 or something.

Q: All right. Then you worked for the contractor, but you...you got here somehow.....

A: Yeah, I made it here.

Q: You said farming gets in your blood and...

A: Yeah, I don’t know, it just sort of stays there. I ended up working for them. Then I opened a greenhouse up on the side in a plaza down in Winsted. Just rented, you know, the parking lot and threw up a hundred foot greenhouse. My wife and brother were going to do that and I was gonna still keep working. I was working for them plus I was delivering papers. We leased that for a year and had to get out of there and I put it up in another spot. The other spot didn’t work our and we ended up selling
that and getting out of that and I ended up finding this job up here. Meanwhile, I got divorced. I found this job up here and started, here.

Q: Um hmm. So we're now at Sugar Hill Farm up in Colebrook. You said that this farm...when I initially called you, had a different name and you said that they had sold it.

A: Right, the Sternlieb's owned this farm and he used to sell all different kinds of meats and stuff like that. We used to deliver to stores and...and all that.

Q: So he had a beef farm? Angus or did he...

A: He...he raised his own cows and his own sheep. Everything else he...he bought in, you know. Bought in pheasants and turkeys and then just resold them all. He was into organic and natural type of meat.

Q: He was here when you arrived. Had he been here very long?

A: Moe...Moe was here for a total of about eighteen years. He was...well, he had a lot of money and someone else more or less ran the farm.

Q: Where had he come from?

A: He...he got into the sales and stuff at the beginning and stuff like that. He just hired people to run the place.

Q: Had he been in agriculture before those eighteen years?

A: No, he was an accountant and he had like fifty people working for him and stuff like that.

Q: Where did he come from?


Q: Did he live here, though?

A: Part-time.

Q: In the summer? I mean, was he...?

A: Well, he'd like come up on weekends and stuff like that and he'd sometimes stay. Near the end he stayed, you know, only the weekend. I guess when he first started, I believe he stayed up here quite a bit to get everything going the way he wanted and...But, it ended up getting run down so much. He had...he...he couldn't keep help
and you know, the different managers ended up running his business down real bad. When I came here he was...he wasn’t really doing any business. He was just throwing his money away.

Q: I was going to ask you, where was his market? How did he distribute these meats and so on?
A: Through stores and had a little store under...under here that sold to anybody around here, and restaurants and...and whatnot.

Q: So he had a sales force on the road?
A: Yeah. Mostly, he took care of that. I think, him and his wife at the beginning.

Q: He was still and accountant in his other part of his life?
A: Um hmm.

Q: How big an area did they sell to? I’m just...
A: I’d say maybe forty miles.

Q: How many acres are there, here?
A: Three hundred.

Q: So he stayed and then as business declined, maybe because the managers ran it down...do you want to talk about that in any way? How...how it declined or what do you think caused the decline?
A: Well, Moe was a very hard man go get along with, anyways. He really was.

Q: I know people like that.
A: He...he didn’t treat people like people should be treated, you know. So I don’t know...I guess I’m different but I think that’s the way people should be treated. Nicely anyway, whether they’re a millionaire or whether they are poor or whatever and you don’t really see that today, too much. And most people with money, I think, believe they’re a lot better than other people. I...I think that was his biggest problem. And he was...I think he...he destroyed some of his business himself to the customers also. I’m sure if he heard me say all that he wouldn’t like it, but...
Q: Well, I have to tell you, I interviewed some people last week who are the owners of this establishment and they both said that they don’t have people skills and they hire people to do their selling for them because they know they don’t have the patience.

A: Right.

Q: And so I mean, it…it happens to everybody, and they just said, we don’t do that, we hire people who deals with the public.

A: I think he would have been a lot better off if he did the same thing. But...

Q: So you’ve been now through that owner and then, a new owner who has been here how long?

A: About a year and five months or something, year and four months.

Q: And where did they come from?

A: Well, they have a place in Rocky Hill and a place in Florida. They more or less bought this for their son. And that didn’t work out.

Q: Did he move here?

A: The son? Yes. Yeah, he moved in and he was supposed to help me on the farm. I guess he didn’t realize that it was work. So he moved in and he moved his dogs into the barn. He had pitbulls and whatnot. He had about thirty of them and it was…if it didn’t work out I wasn’t going to stay anyhow because I had you know, five children and I didn’t really like them barking and the pitbulls.

Q: So, he was breeding pitbulls?

A: Yeah.

Q: Or boarding other people’s?

A: No, no. They were all his. And it just didn’t work out. He…he was here for probably three months. I wouldn’t say, on this side of the road, he worked more than twenty hours in three months.

Q: What was the rest of the farm being used for at that time?

A: Well, we had more or less the same thing that Moe had here. You know, the sheep and the cows and well, we had pigs. We raised a few turkeys and chickens and the horses and…
Q: How many... I saw the sheep when I drove up. How many... what happens to... to the meat now?

A: Well, we... we raise... there's about a hundred sheep. We breed so that they're... the lambs are ready for Easter. We just sell either... people... a lot of people come in and buy them alive you know.

Q: So you have your reputation. They know you're here?

A: Yeah, and what we don't sell, we ship to the auction or the dealer or whatever.

Q: Where is the auction?

A: The auction is in Northampton, Massachusetts that we usually go to.

Q: And what about the horses and the pigs?

A: Well, the pigs, we sell the little ones here or the same thing. We ship 'em to the auction. The horses are just here for the owners' pleasure.

Q: How many of them are there?

A: There's four horses.

Q: Did... did the parents of this young man... young man... I don't know how old he is... have the parents ever been here?

A: Oh, the parents come up, they live in the house when they come up, you know.

Q: He actually left... physically left the place after three months?

A: Yes. Yeah. The parents, there, again, to own a farm like this you gotta have a lot of money. You know, you do 'cause it takes a lot of money especially running the way they were running it. I mean, it's a... you just can't make money on a few sheep and a few pigs and horses. So I mean, he has five car dealerships so he has a good income.

Q: ... I was going to ask you about a tax benefit for him.

A: Right. People don't like to look at or let you know about that kind of thing. You know, I mean, they don't... Moe or John or... they don't... they don't like you bring that up if you know what I mean. You know...

Q: That's why I hesitated asking.

A: Yeah, they just don't. They want you to do your job and that's it.
Q: If neither Moe nor the present owner had background in farming or agriculture, you can manage it the way you want to? Or, do they have certain expectations about how...What is it like to be a manager?

A: It’s tough being a manager because like on this farm, this is a oh, we’ll call it a tax write off farm because to me that’s what it is. When I was brought up and I had my...ended up getting my dairy, I...I worked many hours you know. And they don’t know what any of that is about. You know, on a farm if the fence breaks and you fix it. They don’t see that. If the sheep get out, you end up putting ’em back in, if the plumbing breaks I fix it. If it’s too big a job, then we hire somebody or whatever but ninety per cent of the stuff that I do they don’t even know or see. It’s hard to explain to ’em or whatever. They don’t really want to hear it more or less. Most people do. John was a very good person to work for. Moe was the hardest person I ever worked for and John was the best person that I ever worked for.

Q: This is the present owner?

A: This is the present owner. But there’s just so many things that happen on a farm that...that break down. I mean, if you hired somebody to fix all that every time, it would...it would cost a fortune, you know? Me being brought up poor, I like to try to fix whatever I can fix on the tractors or whatever. The machinery, the plumbing, the small things on electricity or whatever, I always try to save money. But, when you...when you have that kind of money I guess you can just spend it but...

Q: If you were going to hire it done, where would the people come from to do it? I mean, are they still available?

A: You’d call up a plumber...

Q: A plumber and electrician...I’m thinking about fencing and...

A: Fencing, you could hire a professional. They come in and put all your fences up or whatever. The little things you know, I mean, you wouldn’t hire somebody for something like that, you just wouldn’t. A lot of the stuff I could...you can, painting the fences, you know, you just go on and on and on.

Q: Have you ever been asked to write down all the stuff you do? Have any of your...the owners ever...?

A: No. No, because it would...it would just take you too long. You don’t have time you know? You just don’t.

Q: What kind of records do you have to keep?
A: Oh, records on the sheep and whatnot. The pigs when they’re going to have babies and...

Q: I noticed your... your things up there. You’re very organized.

A: Well, try to be but... not organized enough I don’t think. It’s just... time is, you know.

Q: Are you responsible for the buildings... the house at all? Their house?

A: Well...

Q: When they come up.

Q: Otherwise, it sits empty?

A: Yeah, it sits empty most of the time.

Q: And are you responsible for it also?

A: Oh, I take care of, you know, the alarm or anything goes wrong. I water the flowers. I take care of the vegetable garden, the apple orchard and you know?

Q: Do you ever sell the apples? Is it that large of an orchard?
A: Well, John... John lets the kids sell the apples. Yeah, there's quite a few apples. He lets my kids sell 'em.

Q: Okay.

A: Which is really pretty neat.

Q: Yeah. So, it (the farm) just went on the market, again, since I called you.

A: Well, I... I love it here. I... I would like to, you know, buy like this side of the road but I mean, it's just not... you couldn't do it. You couldn't farm here.

Q: The soil is not sufficient to make it or it's not... there's a lot of it in forests?

A: Yeah. Yeah, I'd say half of it.

Q: Has it ever been logged or anything like that?

A: Oh yeah, Moe logged it right before he sold it. He logged everything off. But to have a farm in Connecticut, it's just as... as you know, they're... just all going out. Why should you have a farm when you could sell this piece of land and make so much money on the houses. You know, put up houses and... If you farm it, you're lucky if you... you couldn't pay the mortgage on this. I mean, you know, you're talking a million and a quarter here if you bought both sides of the road or something like that anyhow.

Q: How much is selling it as farmland acreage as compared to selling it as development land? Is that million as farmland or development land, do you think?

A: It... it would cost you the same because if they're going to sell it, they're going to get their best price. If it was sold as farmland we could go back quite a few years and buy it for a hundred thousand or something. Then maybe you could make a living at it but, not today.

Q: I travel around the state doing this, do people in this northwestern part of the state... have there been many instances of farms selling their development rights to preserve the farmland? Do you know?

A: There is a few. As a matter of fact, a piece of this one did. I think it's forty acres down back. It's all wood and whatnot. I'm pretty sure that Moe did that forty acres of this.

Q: That will always have to be kept into...

A: Or... or it might have been just forest.
Q: Oh, oh. All right. There’s a forest...there’s an environment (easement) thing too.

A: Right, so it might have been that. ‘Cause I remember...that...yeah, that...that would have to be because you couldn’t farm that forest.

Q: What kind of connections do you have with other people who are managers or other farmers in this area? Just as a person. Personal connection. Are there other managers? Are there other farms being managed like this one is?

A: Oh yeah, there’s a lot of them. Yeah. They’re not as big as this one I don’t think. They’re...they’re just small you know. I know of an older man that takes care of a place just down the street, you know. It’s the same type of thing. It’s just the Richard people own it and it’s just a tax write-off type thing, you know.

Q: And they have a home in the country?

A: Yeah, they have a home in the country and they raise a few sheep or whatever and couple cows and...

Q: From what I’ve read, from way back in the early part of the century, a lot of the land in this part of the state was used that way. There were people who came out of New York and New York City and spent their summers up here and then eventually bought property here and continued to summer out here. I don’t know how large the farms were but...but historically, it goes back a long time.

A: Hmm. I didn’t realize that.

Q: Yeah. I didn’t either until I started this project.

A: I don’t think it’s all bad that it happens this way...

(End of side one.)

...because I mean, otherwise this farm would have probably just plain got developed. You know what I’m saying? It would have just been developed so this land would have not been here. You know?

Q: I was going to ask you...

(Tape interruption.)

...were talking about whether it was sold for development rights. What I asked before the tape ran out was, if this was sold for development, who would live here?

A: I believe people from New York or New Jersey or you know, somebody just who likes a place for a summer house or weekend.
Q: So probably, just guessing at this, it wouldn’t be like houses on two acre lots. It might be a home on twenty or forty acres to preserve what they would want around it.

A: Right, right. In Colebrook, they don’t like small developments like that. Just moving in and taking over the place, I don’t think.

Q: Do they have zoning? How far out do they go with their regulations, building regulations?

A: I’m not really sure of that but if you look around Colebrook, Colebrook is not like that. I mean, there’s a lot of rich people that have land in Colebrook. A lot of them have their second home you know, or third or whatever. It’s a very pretty place to live but...

Q: It’s beautiful. You know, how did you learn to manage? I mean, you were talking about being in your own...you seem to have this...this initiative and desire to be your own business. Some of the things that you talked about on the tape talked about you doing things. Now you’re...you’re working for someone else but it does give you the same decision making. You can still pretty much do your...whatever you think is right, can’t you?

A: Right...right. Yes, yes. But you go from person to person and different people have their own thoughts on what they want or...you know. I don’t have to pull the money out of my pocket when the tractor breaks down, you know? I’ve thought of asking him but I can’t think of a way that...that I could run this farm to pay the mortgage and to make a living for myself on...on farming. If you brought in the public, something like that you know, then maybe you could. A campground or, you know, for the mentally retarded or whatever, you know. Something like that. Something for kids or...then maybe you could make it but in...in farming, there’s no way. I mean, even if he...even if he sold you this place for three hundred thousand or something, you couldn’t make it farming.

Q: Could this farm support a large dairy herd like...there are some that milk four hundred cows?

A: You could, but the farm equipment’s important. I mean, you could buy in...you could have your dairy here and buy in all your feed.

Q: Because it’s rocky up here? There’s not enough acreage to support that?

A: No way there’s enough acreage, you know. I wouldn’t want to go back into dairy farming, anyways. I really wouldn’t.

Q: I talked to one farm and they said they hadn’t been on vacation until they finally sold their herd.
A: Right.

Q: Now you talked about this other manager down the road, an older man. How do you learn what you need to know? How do you keep updated on what you need to know? That's one question. The first question that's going to be is, are there other managers... do you ever get together. I mean, this is going to sound funny... is there a farm managers' association?

A: No.

Q: Is there any group where you can go for support or talk to or, how do you...?

A: No, I... I've just learned it along the way so more or less it's... it's mostly just common sense stuff. You... you gotta... have a lot of common sense, you know. I mean, you got to be able to fix something that... just to get by, sometimes. You can't... if you're haying and you're haybine breaks down, you have to... you have to fix it, you have to get it going you know, best that you can.

Q: So you have to have some kind of mechanical know how, at least?

A: Yes, yeah. Usually, the toughest thing for me is when I'm by myself, a lot of times you need two people. But I've learned to cope with that most of the time. If I need two people, I... I go down and I, like you say, the guy down the street, Maynard, if I need a hand I call him up. If he needs a hand, he calls me up. You know, it's back in the old day type thing. I have friends that'll come up and help me out if I... if I need 'em.

Q: Do you ever now employ other people at all during any peak season?

A: Well, this farm's... to have it kept up the way that the owners want. You should have at least a full-time man. You really should. We have hired a part-time guy that works like nine hours a week you know. I mean, nine to twelve but that's almost useless, you know? I mean, it does help out but you can't come anywhere near... you see. Everybody likes the place kept up really nice and to do that, you know. When I first took this job, I was supposed to work forty to fifty hours a week. Well, for a farmer, forty to fifty hours a week is nothing. You... you can't hardly even get started for that. During the summer when you're haying and whatnot, you... I put ninety, hundred hours in. But that's more or less my own time that I just give away. You know, 'cause when you're... you can't just leave the hay out there or leave the animals unfed or the fence have to be fixed or...

Q: So during hay... during haying do you bring in anyone else to help beside down the road?
A: Once in a while I’ll have friends or relative or something help out.

Q: ‘Cause you have all the equipment here that you need?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you get your housing as part of your...?

A: Yes, I get the house and the heat, lights, which helps our a lot. But the farm...when you’re a manager of a farm, you’re always have to be here, you know?

Q: It’s like having your own farm.

A: Yeah, I mean, there’s...there’s work even when your work is done and your phone rings at night. You know, it just goes on and on and on. You don’t get time off like other people. You know, vacations and every weekend and all that kind of stuff, you know, which most people get vacations and they...they only work five days a week.

Q: Now, you’ve remarried and you have children. You have five children did you say?

A: Five children. I have three, she has two.

Q: And where do they go to school?

A: Oh, the two go right here in Colebrook. My ex-wife moved to New Britain and they go in New Britain.

Q: So two live with you?

A: Um hmm. The other lives part-time, the other three. Since...since she moved to New Britain, I don’t...I don’t get them very often. Every other weekend I get them and sometimes every weekend. I used to get them a lot because she used to just live two miles down the road.

Q: Now may I ask, does your present wife work, also?

A: Yes.

Q: Nearby?


Q: Um hmm. You talk about your friends and...and the people who live around here. So the community is made up of people who own the farms and are part-time residents or work on these same farms. Who are the other people in Colebrook who live
here... who might be considered part of Colebrook? Are there businesses in Colebrook? I’m trying to get a sense of the... what the community is like.

A: Colebrook is hardly anything. I mean, there’s one store and post office and you know, the town hall and...

Q: Where do the kids go to high school?

A: They’ll go in Regional Seven which is down in Winsted.

Q: What do you do for fun?

A: Usually work. (Laughter)

Q: Work is right, yeah. I don’t mean for fun. That sounds kind of young but leisure time, what do you do?

A: The most time that I have is like we’ll have friends and family come up and go on hayrides right here on the farm and, you know, picnics. Every year I have a pig roast and invite friends and family. That’s more or less my fun. I’d rather... I’d rather stay here than go out and watch a movie.

Q: How long did it take them to sell the farm when Moe was here once he put it on the market?

A: I’m gonna say about six years. Yeah. Because he had it on the market before I came. And I’m only guessing at that.

Q: How long can... do managers... in other words, you’ve managed this now for two owners. Let’s just say it takes four years to sell. Then, do managers anticipate the need to move or do they most often stay on with the new owner?

A: Hard telling. If... it depends on who comes in whether you get along or whether you... I don’t know... it makes you nervous because you’re here on the farm. You don’t know if it’s going to get sold for development. You don’t know who’d going to be the person that’s walk in the... in the... takes over and goes for it. I don’t know, I’m forty-five and I really don’t want to work for another Moe, you know? I don’t think they change hands quite that quick though usually, see? Well, this farm this time was bought for a different reason. This was bought for the person’s son which didn’t work out. So now the person has this and you know, it’s really not what he wanted.

Q: It’s a lesson for parents isn’t it?

A: He bought it to teach his child what life was about more or less and that you do have to work. He has money but he doesn’t want to hand his money to his son. He wants
his son to know what life’s about other than just eating off of that silver spoon. I have a lot of respect there. John made all his money himself. You know, he came up from the bottom. When he was young he used to pick up cans and whatnot and bring them home and buy milk for the...for his brothers and sisters. I mean, he...he was at the bottom so he knows something. That’s why he has that in his blood. If you...if you were never...if you were never there, you don’t know. You know, if you’re a millionaire or whatever your whole life, you don’t know what them people down the ladder do.

Q: Do you know what the son’s doing now?
A: No. Nope.

Q: Did you ever get involved with the Farm Bureau or the Grange either when you were farming or since you’ve been here?
A: No. You don’t really have the time to do that. You know, I guess you only have the time that you make, as they say. I just spent most of my time here.

Q: Do you get any information from...I mean, you have sheep and you have horses...how did you...you just learned all of this by experience or did you ever have magazines or information that you get about these things?
A: Most...most everything by experience. It’s like even the vet, I mean, I do a lot of that stuff myself, you know. But you can’t do big stuff, you just do small stuff. Like worming ‘em and...I didn’t know anything about sheep at all when I came here. It’s just an animal, you know, so you do what you can do. If you can’t do it, you just know you can’t do it so you...you have to call the vet.

Q: Are sheep really dumb?
A: Sheep are the dumbest things on earth almost, I think.

Q: I would say, that’s a silly question. I’ve just had people tell me you know, sheep are really....
A: No, if there’s an opening over there and they can fit their head through it, they believe they’re going through it. So, they’ll run at that opening full speed ahead and, just...they’re not going to fit.

Q: Whereas a cat knows that if the whiskers...they...they have that...maybe sheep need whiskers. (Laughter)
A: I think they need a brain ‘cause sheep are very stupid. Yeah. A lot of times I’ll go down in the field and even find them on their back. This is not just all stupid but you
find them on their back and they can’t...they can’t get back on their feet. So you have
to go out there and flip them over to get them back on their feet. Or, you’re bringing
them into the barn. The door is, you know, three feet wide, and every sheep thinks
they’re going through that door at the same time.

Q: Isn’t that amazing. And you don’t notice that with pigs or cows or anything like that?

A: No. Sheep are easier to herd around ‘cause...or usually because all you need is a
bucket of grain and they’ll follow you anywhere. And, they’re a lot smaller to handle
than cows but their feet grow real bad. Their hooves you know? So you have to trim
them.

Q: Sheep could never have been kept in stanchions because they couldn’t have been
taught what stanchion to go to.

A: Oh, no. Sheep, I think all you can teach them is...is like that little story you know,
“follow her to school one day.” I mean they’ll follow you around but that’s about it.

Q: Very interesting. Is there anything else you’d like to talk about? Let’s ask this. What
has been your greatest joy and satisfaction working in agriculture?

A: I guess just the atmosphere, and bringing up my children. Yeah, it’s a very good place
to bring up children, I think. The city, the drugs, whatever. Out here you’re...you’re
by yourself and it’s peaceful and the kids learn about nature and breeding the animals.
It just comes to ‘em naturally as they get older. They just learn stuff from a young
age.

Q: And where do you think you get your love of a farm, from?

A: From my father’s farm. Yeah.

Q: But he hadn’t had a farm originally.

A: Not originally but I was young yet.

Q: And, what do you think sent him off to a farm eventually?

A: There was twelve of us so he...he raised his own garden and he had his own cows and
pigs and chickens and you know, milk. It’s not like horses and stuff like that. It was
just...he had twelve kids. It was...I don’t know how he ever made out. But, or my
mother.

Q: Now, tell me again what had he done when he lived in town. Before he went to the
farm, what did he do?
A: My father?
Q: Yeah.
A: My father was a carpenter for forty years. Then he had three bad heart attacks and he ended up selling oil.
Q: And at what point of that did he go off to the farm? Was he a carpenter when...
A: He was a carpenter, yes.
Q: When he had the farm?
A: Yeah.
Q: Okay. What was your greatest frustration?
A: I don't know. I always wanted my own farm and I was... the greatest one... that's a hard one. I guess I was kind of disappointed when I got out of farming but I realized that there just wasn't money in it. There wasn't enough money to really get anywhere. I... I always wanted to get... I guess like anybody, further ahead, you know, better life for your children or whatever. I don't think I look at that as much as I used to because today, if you look at the world, I'm better off than a lot of people, and so are my kids. Just being brought up this way rather than the other way.
Q: I appreciate very, very much you're being willing to talk about this. Is there anything else you'd like to say?
A: It's kind of disappointing in... in the way that I think the people that feed you in this world don't get taken care of at all. I guess it's the knowledge that we have that really pays off money-wise. But I guess, there I go again, back to money. We all have to have it but... I mean, I'd give anything if I could just buy this farm. If I had enough money but there isn't.
Q: But by being a manager you have a...
A: We do until somebody says, "All right, we're going to get rid of this place," you know, and the next thing you know somebody comes in and says, "All right, we're going to develop it," or whatever or, "We decided we're gonna run it," so now you didn't just lose your job, you lost your house and everything.
Q: It's kind of like being a minister and at some congregations, for years, the congregation owned the house. When the minister left, the family had little of there own... I don't know...
A: Right, yeah. That happens a lot, yeah.

Q: Well, I thank you very, very much.