Q: I am interviewing Jayne Grant, who had worked for a number of years with the Connecticut Sheep Breeders Association. Jayne, thank you so much for agreeing to do this as part of the Ag 20th Century Project. Can you tell us, where were you born?

A: I was born in Hartford, Connecticut.

Q: And how did you get involved with sheep?

A: Well, actually I was going... in Keney Park and at that time, the City of Hartford maintained a large flock of sheep there in the Park mostly for the drawing of blood for Hartford Hospital. But from that point on I didn’t see a sheep or associated with them until I came to college. I entered college in 1945 and I majored in Animal Science.

Q: What was your interest?

A: I was very fond of horses and had horses at home but then I got interested in the other forms of livestock.

Q: What did they use the blood from the sheep for?

A: I really don’t know.
Q: Interesting. So you actually lived in the city...

A: Well, 'til I was four years old and they we moved back to my grandfather's home in Jewett City. There I would continue...I was educated, you know...

Q: With the schools in...?

A: Through the schools in Griswold. Um hmm.

Q: What was your grandfather's farm like?

A: He was not a farmer, he was a banker.

Q: All right, but he had property, land.

A: No. we lived in the town. Okay. Later on, my father bought property in a farm for residence out in the Town of Griswold and that's where we resided.

Q: What do you remember about school?

A: About school?

Q: In Jewett City. What was it like?

A: Well, we had many of the problems we're having today in school. It was a small class. The graduating class from high school was only forty-five students. The four years of my high school were the four years of World War II. We saw many teachers leave and some of the classmates left to go to the war. And then when I came to college, I entered in the Fall of '45 with the returning veterans. There was a big change in...

Q: And then you became an Animal Science Major?

A: I was majored in Animal Science and when I got my degree, I worked in Animal Pathology for two years. In the meantime, I had married and then I started my family and I never did go back to work.

Q: What did you do in Animal Pathology...on campus?

A: It was virus isolation of poultry diseases.
Q: You were at UConn in Animal Pathobiology?
A: Yes, yes.
Q: Big changes there too.
A: I was actually in Diseases, as it was called. It was not called Animal Patho.
Q: So then talk about when you started working on your own. You have how many acres here?
A: Well, we have five acres. As the children got older, they entered 4-H and started with sheep projects. Their father became Club Leader and they had the Club for about twenty years. The youngest girl is the one that had the breeding sheep and then she married and left and went to Missouri. She took the best of her sheep with her and left oh, five or six behind. Since we had enough pasture for them, we didn’t want to have all lawn, well, we kept the sheep and I...I took care of them ‘cause, of course, Don was still working and all and he had enough of sheep all day long. So I took care of these sheep. And we still have them.
Q: Interesting. Now, how many sheep?
A: They’re purebred Southdowns. I did show them for a while but I... These are now, generations down. We don’t keep a sheep much over seven years old. No, they’re not the original five or six.
Q: I was thinking they were old sheep.
A: No, they’re not old sheep. We sold stock, purebred stock and put a couple in the freezer every year.
Q: How many children did you have?
A: Two daughters. They are both UConn graduates in Animal Science. They married graduates in Animal Science. And I have a granddaughter at Colorado State who’s finishing her junior year in Animal Science.
Q: So one daughter went into sheep and an interest in animals. What did the other one do with her?

A: She and her husband managed a beef cattle farm in New Hampshire. Then the whole farm moved to Maine and that’s where they are today. She does work off the farm but she is active in the beef industry.

Q: And your granddaughter, what does she expect to do? Has she any idea?

A: At this point, no. She’s been active on the judging teams and was just elected President of the Block and Bridle Club out there. I don’t know exactly where this will lead her.

Q: People change their majors...

A: I know. She went from wanting to be a journalist to an agricultural journalist and now she’s strictly in agriculture and animal science. She grew up on a beef cattle farm...Hereford, polled Hereford farm and so she was in 4-H very young and did very well in 4-H with beef cattle. Oh, she also showed a pig or two and sheep once in a while but her main interest was beef cattle.

Q: Let’s talk about the Sheep Breeders Association. When did it begin in Connecticut and what were the sheep...we don’t need to go to years? We can always fill this in, later, but tell me what the status of sheep was at one time historically in this State.

A: Well the Connecticut Sheep Breeders Association is over a hundred years old. It was formed in the late 1800’s. When there were a lot of sheep in Connecticut. They were mostly part of a dairy operation or a diversified farming operation along with perhaps, orchards and dairy cattle. Of course, they had the work horses and they had the sheep. They used the sheep for the wool to be sent off to make blankets for themselves and clothes...and material to be made into clothing. They worked well on the Connecticut farms because not all the land lends itself to be tilled and the sheep would do a lot of grazing to keep down the brush and so forth.

Q: So it was part of their subsistence farming. Then did any of it become a cash crop or...

A: It contributed toward the farm. There were not, to my knowledge, any sheep farms, strictly sheep. They were mixed with the other enterprises but mostly dairying.
Q: When they sent their wool off... now they do it like a hobby.

A: Yeah.

Q: And back then did they aggregate the wool and send it up or did they just use their own and send it someplace who did this? Were there people who put it together?

A: Well, in the late '40's the Connecticut Sheep Breeders in association with the New England Sheep and Wool Growers Association held pools, wool pools. They were held in June after the shearing had been done around different areas in the State. Connecticut’s always had two pools (Now they have none), where the producers brought their wool and it was sorted and sold all at once through a buyer.

Q: So, they weighed it in?

A: They weighed it in and it was all shipped or trucked to the processing plant. Back about thirty years ago, when we were being more active with it, we were sending over twenty thousand pounds out of the pool held here in Storrs. A lot of that was trucked directly down to the Carolinas to the woolen mills.

Q: Did people keep some for themselves to use or was it...?

A: Well, some producers do if they have an exceptionally good fleece. There are several places mainly up in Maine, where you can send your wool and have yarn made or exchange for blankets. Of course, you don’t get your wool back, you know, it...you send your wools and the...then it’s processed and then you get it back.

Q: So they give you credit for so many pounds and then you get...?

A: Pounds and then...yeah, right. Quite a few people do that. The hand knitters will do it.

Q: How many different kinds of sheep are there in Connecticut? Are there different parts of the Country that have a different kind of a breeder stock that they use?

A: Yeah, right, yeah.

Q: And because of our climate and so on, what kind of wool do we get...?

A: Well, it used to be mostly the mutton breeds, what we call the mutton breeds here in the Northeast. They were produced for the meat. Not mutton. Americans are not mutton eaters, the English are. We like to eat our lamb before it’s a year old when it’s still lamb. But if the mutton breeds were raised to get the lamb, then the Southdowns were notorious for their tenderness of meat and flavor and so forth. And there’s the Hampshires and Dorsets which are very prominent.
Q: What's the difference in what they...?

A: Well, the difference is in the size, the breed characteristics like the coloring of the head, the wool. The mutton breed wool isn't as great as the wool on the long wool breeds and medium wool breeds. But it can still be planted in with the others.

Q: Let's go back to the Association. Were there many breeders in the State at that time? You said there were three pools or several pools (Pools, yeah.) and so did you have to have a certain number of sheep to be able to join?

A: No. Probably like flocks would run twenty-five ewes, breeding ewes. They weren't huge flocks. I'm talking this is back in the 1950's. I don't know that much about it before then. Then they gradually evolved to hobby flocks. And a lot of those are the outshoots of the 4-H Clubbers and there's quite a few. I think presently there's probably a hundred members in the Connecticut Sheep Breeders and some of them might have just two or three sheep. A lot of them are hand spinners that will keep two or three just for their own use for the wool. I don't think there is any place other than the University that now has a professional shepherd. There used to be quite a few professional shepherds. Yale University had a flock of sheep on their Research Farm. They had a professional shepherd. And there was several other wealthy people that had farms that had flocks of sheep and they had professional shepherds but they've disappeared.

Q: In what part of the State would those have been?

A: Well, probably mostly in the Western part of the State, Fairfield and up through Litchfield County.

Q: And would those have been gentlemen farmers who had managers and superintendents and so on?

A: Right, um hum. Once the incentive, the tax incentive you know, was taken off, they've kind of disappeared.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about the tax incentive?

A: Well, when they were subsidized.
Q: How were they subsidized?

A: Well, the wealthy people would buy farms and put in a purebred flock, purebred herd
and then they got great tax deductions. But then that...that all stuck into an end and
actually it sort of hurt the purebred business.

Q: So about what year would that have been?

A: That was about twelve years ago I would say that that stopped and then you saw
them dispersing.

Q: If we had breeder stock, here, did...where did they sell it?

A: They’d sell it privately or they could have their own production sales or the
Associations help sales too. Like New England Sheep and Wool Growers Association
has a sale every July which is held at the Eastern States Fairgrounds and there’s sales
in New York and all through the Midwest. A lot of people from around here go out
there with their sheep to sell.

Q: Where are the pockets of sheep breeders and herds now?

A: Midwest.

Q: It is moving West?

A: In the far West too, the Rocky Mountains.

Q: And these are still diverse farms—or are they pure sheep herds?

A: No. They’re...no. A lot of them are pure sheep farms. But a lot of them are, let’s call
them, family farms, or perhaps the father or the mother will be working off the farm
but they still have their purebred sheep. And a lot of the farms are larger than around
here whereas around here we’re mostly all hobbyists now. There’s a lot of people that
go into it that have had no background in sheep, whatsoever. They never studied it,
they just have a few acres and they, you know, like to keep it down rather than having
to mow it. Or, they get them for their children. They think they’ll make good pets. So
what’s happened then they pick up knowledge as they go along or they completely
forget the whole thing, you know. And that’s seems to be the way it is.

Q: How big does a pet sheep get? And, if they only have two or three I have to assume
that they live someplace that the zoning allows this.

A: Yes, you of course, you have that problem.
Q: A lot of people do like to have a few acres because they can have a few...

A: But they got to check out their zoning rules and regulations. Lots of times a 4-H projects are allowed but not an adult project, so to speak.

Q: So how big do these sheep get, weightwise?

A: Well, it depends on the breed.

Q: If I were going to buy one for a child as a pet...?

A: Which is not a good idea. They try to discourage that because, oh sure, they’re cute and cuddly but they do grow up.

Q: And so how big do they get?

A: Well, they range from a hundred and fifty pounds up to three hundred pounds and they can, of course, get pretty mean...the rams.

Q: When you had them sheared, what kind of process was done over these twenty-five years? You said there were shepherds at one time on the larger flocks. Now are there sheep shearsers that travel around?

A: Yes, there are, there are. Usually a shepherd could do his own, could do their own. But there were and there are shearsers. Of course, they are getting fewer. Quite a few girls do it and they will travel around the different farms. Don has always done it but he isn’t doing it anymore. In fact, he used to go out and shear too, some but it’s pretty hot. It’s pretty rugged work. You’ve got to have a good back. So we’re taking all of our sheep up to the Connecticut Sheep Breeders Association Field Day and Wool Festival, which is a Saturday up at TAC (Tolland Agricultural Center). They’re having a professional shearer come in and shear for people who bring in just a few sheep. They like to have this going on all day so that people, the spectators, will have something to see ‘cause people are interested in this. So our sheep will go up there and be shorn.

Q: And then what will you do with the wool this time?

A: Oh, go into the pool. There’s still a pool in Rhodé Island, and we used to have the pool here in Storrs. It was run by the 4-H Club and they did very well at it and worked hard. It’s hard work. But it’s hard to find anybody to run these pools because you have to make arrangements with a trucker to bring in a big semi to load in and you’ve got to have a wool packing machine. We used to pack it by hand. Nobody wants to work that hard anymore.
The New England Association has a wool packing machine which goes around to different pools but lots of these pools are held on the same day. But anyway, there just wasn’t enough wool coming in to pay to have it. I suppose the Western Connecticut’s go to a New York pool or up to, I think there’s still a pool in Hadley, Massachusetts. And there’s one held in Rhode Island. I haven’t gotten the dates of the pools yet.

Q: Why is it being held up in Vernon at TAC?

A: The Field Day? It’s been there quite a few years. We used to go around to different farms and have our Field Day every May. That was one of the big things the Association did. It was more or less for the members and it...or anybody interested to know about it. We’d go around to the different farms. Then it got so there weren’t too many big farms left to hold this at. And then the insurance problems entered the picture. Then we had it over at the Hicks Arena for quite a few years, our Field Day. We’d have a shearing contest and a judging contest for the ewes and a dog trial which was held on the side of Horse Barn Hill.

Q: What is a dog trial?

A: Sheep...the sheep herding trial. Then we held it on the side of Horse Barn Hill which was a great place to hold it ‘cause people could sit in their cars along the road and watch it. And then some of the members thought we should have commercial exhibits and we could not have that at the Hicks Arena. So we moved to TAC where we could have commercial exhibits. And then it gradually turned into more of an affair for everyone and not just the members of the Association. It gradually turned into what they now call a Wool Festival instead of a Field Day. They still sell fleeces and they have the shearing demonstration. We did have the sheep dog trial over there but then it got to the point where it was hard to find anybody who really wanted to run it ‘cause it involved five or six people to run it all day long as well as setting it up the day before. You just couldn’t find the folks to run it. Now we just have a dog herding demonstration over there. Last year they invited in the llama people and the angora goat people and angora rabbits. So it’s a fiber show, really.

Q: When you talk about the sheep, what about the veterinarians that cared for the sheep? Was there a cadre of vets that were larger animal vets and has that changed?

A: That certainly has. You’ve got a lot of vets today that don’t really know anything about sheep. And people that raise sheep have got to do most of the work themselves, giving them some shots and delivering lambs and all that sort...you have to do...you have to know that yourself.
Q: What other care do they require? I mean, ears, hooves...what...?

A: They require their hooves to be trimmed. You have to watch...keep an eye on their eyes that they don’t get, you know, ...

Q: Do they have poor eyesight? Is that what...?

A: No, no. Their eyesight’s all right. Everybody says they’re kind of dumb but sometimes they’re aggravating but not always. Sometimes they surprise you. But we worm regularly if they do have a parasite problem, especially on the wet ground.

Q: Talk to me a little bit about the insurance issues. You said the insurance had been a problem.

A: Well, I think it’s mostly liability. You know, the farmers didn’t want to take the risk of somebody being hurt on their farm. And they were disappearing, you know, like the flocks of sheep were getting smaller and on smaller properties...smaller farms and they wouldn’t have the accommodations. Like, we couldn’t have a Field Day, here. We couldn’t park fifty cars anywhere.

Q: You mentioned llamas. When did llamas first start making their way into the fiber system and what do you think...?

A: You’ll have to talk to a llama person about that because I know nothing about llamas. I had never even heard of them until, you know, when we were in college. I mean, none of this was ever studied in college. We didn’t even study goats. You’re going to have to speak to the llama people, they’re willing to talk to you.

Q: What about the people who took the sheep’s wool. You said some of them shipped it out and then it came back as either fiber or cloth. Were there many people who spun their own wool back when you started and...and now as a hobby?

A: Not when I first became involved in 1950. No. It was a few years later that a couple of women started getting involved in the spinning of it. They had some antique wheels and so forth. Of course, I don’t know what happened the first part of the century but I do know that if you pool through the Connecticut pool, you could get material back and have a tailor make a man’s suit.
And they do a lot of blankets too. We got a lot of blankets back. I have blankets that... and I have blankets where I've sent my own wool off to a mill in Pennsylvania or up in Maine and had blankets made for myself. This was out of the pool, I mean it didn’t have anything to do with the pool but I do have some blankets that came from the New England Sheep and Wool Growers pool...

Q: Do many people weave themselves?
A: Yeah. Some did I presume, or in the early part of the century... that was all before the industrial revolution anyway.

Q: So then it becomes a hobby now or an art...?
A: It is a hobby or an art now. There’s a lot of people that weave...

Q: You said there are a hundred people in the Association, still a hundred members. Are these all from Connecticut or are they Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts.
A: Connecticut.

Q: And what do you think motivates them to belong to the Association?
A: I think a lot of those have their youngsters get into 4-H. They like the youngsters to be in 4-H, especially if you’re out of the loop. Well, away from the big cities, let’s put it... there isn’t much rural area left. It’s a good project for the youngsters to have. So then the parents get interested ‘cause they’re carting their kids and their sheep around to fairs and they get kind of interested. I know quite a few that this has happened to, and then they carry on the flock themselves as long as they have the land.

Q: The kids grow up and leave home and the parents get stuck with the sheep.
A: Right, basically that’s happened lots of times.

Q: Let’s go back to the shepherds and the other people. Where did they come from? Where did the hired help come from that did this?
A: Well, the two shepherds that stand out in my mind came from England. One was a shepherd here at the University and a shepherd at Keeney Park. One was an Englishman and the other was a Scotchman.

Q: And did they advertise for them there?
A: I don’t know how the contacts were made.
Q: Can you think of anything else related to the changes in the Sheep Breeders Association and the twenty-five years you were the Secretary?

A: Well, mostly the way we've handled what was once the Field Day. We had the oldest going sheep shearing contest in the Country. I hated to see that end 'cause it was going on for so many years. Well, it got to the point that we didn't get very many entries and it was always held on a Saturday in May and some of them thought they'd be making more money if they were out shearing a flock somewhere. The last professional, true professional shearer I had known has passed away. He would spend most of the Spring into early Summer traveling all over New England shearing large flocks of sheep. He took his own trailer with him often and stayed. You know, he would just make a tour of it so to speak.

Q: Like a circuit rider?

A: Yeah, a circuit bit, and he would go out for quite a few months at a time; and his wife would go with him.

Q: When are sheep going to be sheared?

A: Well, they can be shorn at any time of the year that you want to. A lot of people shear in the fall too 'cause it puts more sheep into their barn. And then you got shows now where the sheep have got to be shorn. The Southdowns are shown, shorn. Then when showing in November, out at the big show in Kentucky, in Louisville, you got to have your sheep shorn.

Q: Because they are looking at the configuration of the sheep?

A: That particular breed, the wool isn't that important.

Q: And what kind is it?

A: The Southdowns. So...so a lot of the purebred people, you know, shear whenever they want to. Actually you don't, of course, get a very good fleece. You're getting very short staple fleece. And, well, they pack baseballs with it.

Q: Would you explain the difference between the kinds of fibers and sheep. How you would describe the different kinds of fibers from sheep. (Ask Don) Okay we'll do that some other time.
A: He (referring to husband, Don Grant) does a lot of wool judging.

Q: Oh, there are wool judges.

A: In fact my granddaughter was on the wool judging team in Colorado. Went around and just judged the fleeces. Not...not while they are on the sheep but when they're off. Oh, there's all different kinds of breeds. Different kinds are usually different things.

Q: I had this...this funny question that was asked me because we were driving past a flock...flock? herd? (Flock.) There was one little black lamb out there and all the rest were white. Now how does a black lamb...do you have any....I mean, I know this is not your area, but...?

A: It's genetic.

Q: Can there be twins and then one be black and one be white? I mean, where does this...if that black one is then bred will it have more black sheep?

A: (Undeciphered comment.)

Q: Okay, we'll...we'll check with...with the other person here (husband).

A: Yeah. I have basic ideas but he can go into it deeper.

Q: Okay. Oh, we were talking about shearing time. You were saying that they can go anytime of the year, sometime depending on the shows, sometimes so that they fit in the barn because you multiplied the size of these sheep a lot. So, basically they don't have to be sheared in the spring at all?

A: They usually are because they're much more comfortable through the summer months to get that wool off of them. Because then the actual growing period, of course, is through the Fall and Winter. Then a fleece can sort of go...start to go dead, you know, lose it's luster and start dropping out on it's own. So, it's time to get it off. So most everybody will shear at this time of year. Then, for show purposes they will shear again and some shear in the Fall when they bring them because they're more comfortable in the barn. Of course, they're not left in the barn all the time. It would be an open barn but when they come in to feed they can get more sheep to the feeder.
Q: How are they housed? I mean, has this changed over a period of years?

A: No.

Q: All right then, how are they housed?

A: It’s usually an open-sided barn where the sheep can run in and out. Yet, the ideal situation would be where you could be pull down doors or closed doors so you could confine them. My sheep are confined today because I don’t want them to get wet ‘cause they’re going to be shorn Saturday. Can’t shear wet sheep.

Q: What about women’s role in this?

A: Lot of women, lot of women. And the women judge too, now. I used to judge sheep. Then when I got a little too many things to do, you know, with teenagers that want to be different places, I just stopped judging. My daughters jaunted all over the United States at big shows.

Q: And is this role of women universal across the Country?

A: Yeah and they’re very, very much into sheep. It seemed to start more in New England with women ‘cause I remember Debbie, even when she went to Missouri in 1980 and her husband had taken on a shepherd’s job at a farm, she would farm out there. Then she got, of course, as involved ‘cause she’s always lived and had sheep. She got involved and helped with the shearing and the trimming and there were very few women doing it at that time. There’s more and more now. But it seemed like in New England the women were pretty well involved in it. It’s something a women can pretty well handle herself.

Q: Is it because the flocks were smaller?

A: The size of the animal is smaller too. You know, it isn’t like hand...of course, some of these dairy women wouldn’t agree with me. But women can handle a flock of sheep pretty well. You know, I’d much rather handle a flock of sheep than a herd of Herefords out here.

Q: Is sheep’s milk used for anything?

A: Cheese.

Q: Cheese.

A: Yeah, there’s been some interest lately in making cheese. They usually import some European breeds for this purpose. I have not tasted any. Maybe I’ve eaten it and not known it. That’s something that...this past decade.
Q: How have the prices changed? What could a person get for wool?

A: It’s terrible. When you think about what a wool blanket would cost in a store and what the farmer gets. We used to have a wool subsidy from the Government. That’s gone. But it’s awful what you get. I mean, it’s got to be a hobby. You just can’t make enough money with the sheep even if you had a hundred. You just can’t. People just got to like them.

Q: We have a tradition in Connecticut, too. There were always a lot of part-time farmers. (Yes.) As I’m reading more and more, it’s always been here and so...Today it’s called hobby but they were always diversified...or they had off-farm jobs or alternative incomes like driving a school bus or things like that.

A: Or running a grist mill or saw mill or something too.

Q: So, can you remember any of the prices back twenty years ago compared to now what it would be like to sell your wool?

A: It wasn’t much better then than now. Not too much better.

Q: Did you ever have any connection with any of the agricultural associations like the Farm Bureau or the Grange? You mentioned 4-H. Or farm insurance or farm banks or things like that?

A: No. No, we were involved with the 4-H.

Q: What are the biggest changes in the people who take a leadership role in the Sheep Breeders Association? Everyone’s so busy now a days.

A: That’s right. That’s hurt. We’ve had an awful hard time finding a secretary to do it since I retired. I mean, even...even with computers and everything. I mean, I never had a computer at all. It’s all done by hand so to speak. Well, I, you know, I figured my education and association with my husband’s work. I won’t say I was a professional but I was close. They haven’t had anybody with any background other than people that have a few sheep.

Q: What were some of the biggest joys and satisfactions you had working with sheep?

A: Well, I like...I like outdoors. I always preferred to be in the barn as to being in the house doing housework. I enjoyed watching the youngsters show and fit.
I enjoyed it myself. I used to help show; and, the people, you meet. I enjoyed the people that I met very much. Probably our closest friends are all sheep people and all over the Country. It’s just the sort of life I enjoyed. I was interested in agriculture since I was a child even though I didn’t live on a big working farm, I was always at these working farms visiting and so forth.

Q: Did some of your friends live on farms themselves?

A: Um hum. And we lived across the street from a big farm that still used horses and that was my big attraction as a child, drawing the horses. So, I just loved...I just loved it. My dad was a Forester so I’ve kind of grew up liking outdoors.

Q: Do you remember when that farm across the street went to tractors?

A: It never did. It was sold off into building lots. At least it is now. You know, back in those days, you had to have at least three horses. Draft horses.

Q: This is while you were in Jewett City? Where have you been as a result of your involvement with sheep?

A: Yeah. (Break in conversation)...Kentucky, Ohio, Virginia, Pennsylvania. We been out to California to sheep meetings. Been to Oregon to American Sheep Industry meetings and you keep, you know, meeting the same people. I’ve even taken several trips to England with sheep people from all over. So we made quite a few contacts. And those people have come, in the past, have come to visit the University flocks and often stayed with us. Then through the Associations, the New England Association, we met a lot of people. Don judges all over New England. He has. He’s kind of retired now but we meet a lot of people.

Q: I know you may have mentioned earlier, but where are there the biggest groups of sheep now in New England?

A: Maine has a lot of sheep. Vermont but not as much as they used to but they do have--the larger groups of sheep are in Northern New England.

Q: What were some of the biggest issues you ever faced with sheep? I don’t want to say problems but they could have been problems but anything that...

A: Well, one of they has been the disease called scab that came up in the Suffolk sheep. That was a big problem. The Government went in and took whole flocks. I think that was quite an issue at the time both financially and otherwise, you know. I mean, you have a sheep that you’ve raised and changed the gene...and tried to improve on and then have them taken. Mentally, I guess, it could affect you.
Q: We talked about the breeding but we didn’t talk about the rams. Did they have artificial insemination with sheep too.

A: Don’t use that much, no.

Q: I know that part of it with dairy herd started in Connecticut. They had a big place here off in the other part of the State. So did each flock have a ram or did you...?

A: Yeah, as a rule. Well, I’ve always shared rams with my daughter because she has the same breed. We’d go in together and buy, and a couple others would, too, and buy what they thought was a good outstanding ram. Most of them come from the Midwest. Debbie would keep the ram at her place and I would take over the ewes we’d want bred to that ram. Then she has two or three rams and then she’d sometimes bring a ram over here with some of her ewes and we’d breed our others. It’s, you know, it all depends on the lines. But that’s one thing about sheep, they’re...it “ain’t” changed much. Typical days you know? It has not...I think that’s one of the nice things about it, you know? It’s really a down to earth thing that you do things the old fashioned way and you do it as cheap as you can. If you can make hay feeders out of scrap lumber around the place, you do. You don’t have to put a lot of money into it. Of course, we don’t raise our own grain. This is where it’s expensive. I mean, out in the Midwest there’s farmers are, you know, a lot of them are raising their own grains. They are grain farmers. Their main business probably is grain farmers and sheep are on the side. But here we don’t. We buy all our hay, straw and grain. We do have pastures and we rotate and we take good care of the pastures. They are fertilized, they are clipped, they’re rotated around. You make use of those from May to November when the ewes are not grained or hayed or anything. They just eat the pasture.

Q: So they haven’t played with their formulas for their food as much as dairy?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes. They have done that; different kinds of formulas for different type of feeding that your feeding out lambs or milking ewes and so forth; different grain formulas for that and different protein levels. But we do try to buy the best quality hay we can which comes out of New York State, most of it, or some down from Canada, good alfalfa hay. And for the Winter, especially when they’re at the end of gestation and going into lactation. So that saves on the grain if you have a good hay.

Q: Now, they usually think about a Spring lamb. You must breed other times of the year.

A: Well, the Dorset breed is a breed that will breed in the Fall. Now this is where you get away from the down to earth business. You can implant the ewes so they come into heat. We don’t bother. Used to do a lot of it in college. Now it’s experimental. But, we don’t. When you think spring lamb, that’s kind of a...Because, you know, if you
go into a store to buy a Spring lamb in April, you’re not getting Spring lamb. You
don’t eat Spring lamb until next Fall. Spring lamb is being born now, in the Spring.

Q: So, it’s a marketing piece by the industry?

A: Yes. We’ll have usually the middle of July when we first butcher something and...
When they’re selling Spring… the Spring lamb you would buy in the Spring was
probably born in October, November. Now, our lambs are mostly all born in February
so in July you had a good---before they put on too much fat. That’s changed the
picture, too, a little bit. The fat business. You know? ‘Cause you used to just feed
them and get them nice big fat things but that has changed along like the beef cattle.

Q: Is there anything else you want to talk about relating to...

A: I can’t think of anything. If I do, I’ll tell Don.

Q: I want to thank you very, very much. If you do have pictures at some point or any
kind of other documents you’d like to share with me, I could make copies of them and
then bring them back to you?

A: I probably could find out some more figures, too.

Q: About the changes, that would be great.

A: Yeah. In sheep population and prices if I can locate that. Because I do have
somewhere material sent by the USDA out of their office in New Hampshire, out of
the office that does the censoring.

Q: Thank you again very, very much.
(Break in conversation.)
We’re going to talk a little bit about your father who was a Forester. Tell me his
name.

A: Oh, it was J. Ricketts. He graduated Connecticut Agricultural College in ’13 and it
was the year that they went from a three-year to a four-year school. A lot of them
thought they’d had enough after three years. So he left after three years and went to
Davey Tree Institute in Kent, Ohio where he became a tree surgeon. He also taught
there until World War I and he went to war. Later he was Superintendent of Keeney
Park, which is a natural park and from there he went into the CCC and he was there
for the duration.

Q: This is the Conservation Corp?

A: The Civilian Conservation Corp. He was involved in Camp Wonegone in Voluntown.
He was Assistant Superintendent of the Camp; did a lot of the forestry work along
with road building of that Camp. He was in that Camp until the end of the CCC. Probably he was about the last person discharged from the CCC.

Q: And when would that have been?

A: That was in 1941, right after Pearl Harbor 'cause then the CCC boys all had to go into the service. He did leave Camp Wonegone and went to a camp up in Massachusetts that was composed strictly of World War I veterans. He was Superintendent of that Camp until that was disbanded.

Q: What kind of work did he do ... they had a certain area that they covered?

A: Yes. What they did was they took over a lot of the abandoned farm areas in the State. This Camp Wonegone was in Voluntown and it goes up in public land property in Sterling and Plainfield as well as Voluntown. It was old farms that had been abandoned. This was following the Depression or during the Depression, rather. But the whole movement was started by Franklin Roosevelt in '32. Some camps like Hammonasset was developed by the CCC. Hammonasset State Park. And there's quite a few camps in Connecticut. Up in West Stafford there's the remains of an old camp and they've made a museum out of it. And there's an association of veterans of the CCC and in fact, they meet in Willimantic quite often. I've noticed in the paper.

Q: Now with some of the farms that were reclaimed, were they later then sold as farms again?

A: Well, they became State property.
Q: State Parks and State Forests?.

A: Yeah. Yeah. There were State Forests but they were run by the Government; I mean the development of them. The forest, the road building and all was Government. Of course they set up permanent buildings. The boys that came were most from all over. They lived there. The United States Army ran that part of it. The feeding of them and there was an Army officer, two Army officers at most camps as well as staff. Why don’t you look into that?

Q: I do. I think I’ll check back into that.

A: It was such a part of the agriculture, really, even though it wasn’t direct farming but it was a preservation. A lot of what they did to these old farms was plant them all to trees. Ironically, my son-in-law has been...has harvested some of the trees that probably my dad supervised the planting of. It’s all, you know, the State is doing this, selling the trees off and then replanting.

Q: That’s a product.

A: Yeah.

Q: Thank you so very much for adding that. (Break in conversation.)

A: ---and that’s rural electrification.

Q: Yes.

A: That is ... I think ... there was a program ... they were talking on a talk show on radio one day, “The greatest thing that happened.” And that’s the only thing that I could come up with was rural electrification. What a change that made to everything.

Q: Yes. Yes. I have interviewed a couple of people who have said they remembered when...He was, I don’t remember how old...this man was eighty-nine and he remembered when electricity came into the town near there. When he got it out at the farm and he said to look out and see the lights was...He would just ... click the light on and off all the time because he couldn’t believe it. And the difference it made in everything.

A: Right. It did. Everything and...