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Abstract:

Charles ‘Chuck’ Hartke was born on May 7th, 1944 in Effingham, and grew up on the Hartke family farm in rural Teutopolis, Illinois. Chuck grew up in a large extended family that included five sisters and four brothers. He attended a one room school through fifth grade, then attended school in nearby Teutopolis. He married Kathryn, his high school sweetheart, in 1963, and also began farming on land his father gave him as a wedding present. In 1966 he was drafted, and served in the Army as a medic for two years, including a month in Vietnam. He returned to Teutopolis to farm and raise a family.

In the 1960s, Chuck attended a zoning meeting, and soon found himself involved with community politics. Over time, his involvement in politics steadily increased. He served on the Effingham County Board from 1970 to 1974, became the Effingham County Democratic Party Chairman in 1978, and in 1985 ran for the 108th district in the Illinois House. He served in the House for the next eighteen and a half years, focusing much of his efforts on agricultural issues. For most of those years he was the vice chair of the Agricultural Committee, and one of its most influential member.

In the fall of 2002 he advised the Rod Blagojevich campaign on agricultural issues, and following Blagojevich’s election, Chuck served as the Director of Agriculture until stepping down in the spring of 2008. He discussed the impact of change on the farm during his lifetime, and many issues he faced while Director, including continuing budgetary challenges, an outbreak of Monkey Pox, soybean rust, Asian longhorn beetle and emerald ash borer. He was disappointed when he was unable to travel overseas to promote the state’s agricultural products. He expressed optimism about the future of various bio-energy sources including ethanol, bio-diesel and bio-mass.

Keywords: growing up on the farm in central Illinois; Effingham County Board; Effingham County Democratic Party Chairman; representative in the Illinois House of Representatives; Agriculture Committee in Illinois House of Representatives; ethanol; bio-diesel; bio-mass; Monkey Pox; soybean rust; Asian longhorn beetle; emerald ash borer; Representative Lou Lang; Speaker of the House Michael Madigan; Senate President Emil Jones; Governor Rod Blagojevich

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Interview with Charles Hartke

ALPLM_05_HartkeCha

Interview # 1: September 23, 2008

Interviewer: Mark DePue

- DePue: Today is Tuesday, September 23, 2008. My name is Mark DePue. I'm the Director of Oral History for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, and it's my honor today to be able to interview Chuck Hartke about your experiences as a farmer and as a legislator and as the Director of the Department of Agriculture for the great State of Illinois. Welcome, Chuck.
- Hartke: Well, thank you very much, Mark.
- DePue: Always start with some very straightforward questions. When and where were you born?
- Hartke: I was born here in Effingham County on May 7, 1944.
- DePue: Were you born on the farm?
- Hartke: No, I was born in a hospital, believe it or not. But some of my brothers and sisters were born on the farm.
- DePue: Okay. I'd like to, as much as possible, get a base of information about how your family arrived here in Illinois.
- Hartke: Well, they came from Cincinnati, Ohio, with a group of other settlers who came to the Teutopolis area. They wanted to move west, and so they formed a company around twenty-five or thirty families in Cincinnati, Ohio, and they sent all the money with three of them, and they came acrossed on horseback.
- DePue: About what timeframe would this be?
- Hartke: Oh, probably in the 1830s, 1840s. Anyway, they traveled across the state of Illinois from St. Louis,er, no, from Indianapolis and they arrived in the Champaign area. The land was way too flat, too much water, and so they came further south and they went over to the Saint Elmo area, but the land over there just didn't suit the three guys, the farmers, and so they came back east and they found the area around Teutopolis to be suitable, and so they purchased the land in and around this area. Several thousand acres. And then went back to Cincinnati and then all the families came together in a wagon train, I guess, and settled in the Teutopolis area.
- DePue: Wow. Do you know if any of these people would have come from Kentucky or that region before they went to Ohio? 'Cause I know a lot of this area was settled by what were southerners at that time.
- Hartke: Well, I don't know about that. I do know that most of my relatives and the people that settled in the Teutopolis area came from Cincinnati, Ohio.
- DePue: Okay. Hartke. Is that a German name?
- Hartke: That is a German name, yes. Anne Hunk. Hunk is the other half of the match between my mother and father.

Charles Hartke

ALPLM_05_HartkeCha

DePue: Do you have any idea when your ancestors come to the United States?

Hartke: Well, that's a question you probably should ask my sister Pat.

DePue: She's the family historian.

Hartke: She did the genealogy. She was the family historian, yes.

DePue: Okay. Well, 1830s is still a long way back. Do you have a sense of the family through the generations up to the time that you came along?

Hartke: Well, I do know that my dad came from the Bishop Creek area, which is south about five or six miles here. He came from a family of fourteen and their family—

DePue: And your father's name?

Hartke: My father's name was Alfonse Hartke. He was the son of Joe and Lena Hartke. Lena and Joe had fourteen kids, like I said.

DePue: Which in those days was not unusual at all.

Hartke: Not unusual at all and they came from another family of Joe Hartke prior to that. So that's getting back there quite a ways. Now, on my mother's side, she was an only child. Sophia Hank(??) or Hunk(??) as she was known as.

DePue: English or German?

Hartke: German. Very much German. Anyway, my grandpa—which I did not know, he died when I was a year and a half old. He died in 1945, in July. He had relatives scattered around Littleville, which is the community right north of here, as well as South Dakota and Texas. So he had brothers that scattered in the wind. I don't know why, but. Henry Hanks(??), who's my grandpa, is the only one that stayed in this area. And Uncle Ben and Aunt Josephine, who in the Littleville area, but they had no children at all, either. So.

DePue: In this area of the country, was it primarily Germans who settled the region?

Hartke: Yes. Matter of fact, during World War I, World War II—especially during World War I—there were a lot of concern about whether we were actually loyal Americans.

DePue: Catholics primarily or Lutherans?

Hartke: Mainly Catholic. Unless we talk about the Dutch town war, because the Lutherans were concerned from Altamont when they saw several long pipes arrive on the train in 1918 and that time period, because I guess there was war rattling in Europe at the time, and they were concerned we were bringing in artillery pieces. Actually, they were pipes for the organ at church.

DePue: (laughs) Well, I'm curious. Were some of these churches that your parents or your grandparents going to speaking German in those churches?

Hartke: Oh, absolutely. As a matter of fact, at home, Grandma and mom and my dad—not so much dad, but mom and grandma spoke a lot of German at the table for us kids so we wouldn't understand, especially at Christmas time and Easter and things like that.

DePue: If they didn't want you to know what they were talking about, huh?

Hartke: That's right. They spoke in German.

- DePue: They didn't argue with each other in German, did they?
- Hartke: I never heard my parents argue at all. Never.
- DePue: Very good. Well, tell us a little bit about growing up. You said it was 1944 when you were born?
- Hartke: I was born in 1944.
- DePue: You had a few brothers and sisters?
- Hartke: Yeah. I have five sisters, four brothers. It's a family of ten. Ten of us. I was number seven. Mom and dad had four girls first: Mary Lou, Margie, Sally and then Jerry came along.
- DePue: This is not what's supposed to happen in a farm family, is it?
- Hartke: No, no. And so when Jerry was born, word is, so I'm told by some of my uncles, that dad went out and he really put on a good bender, because mom had finally found the right pattern and Jerry was born. Then he went out and bought a farm, by the way, too. And then Pat came along and dad went and got on a good bender again 'cause mom lost the pattern. I don't know why, but...
- DePue: Pat being a girl?
- Hartke: Pat being a girl. So then in 1944, I was born and he went and got drunk again, bought another farm. Mom had got it right, finally, and so there were seven of us then and then there were three boys followed: Frank, Phil, and Mike.
- DePue: So when you say he went out and bought a farm, you're just casually throwing that phrase out. Is this like an eighty acre farm?
- Hartke: Yeah. An eighty acre farm or, in some cases, a complete farm. I know he bought the Wessendorf place, which didn't have a house on it.
- DePue: What was the name again?
- Hartke: The Wessendorf place. That was 114 acres. And then he bought the Funkhauser farm, which was an area west of Effingham, and then he bought the Pals farm, which is this farm, which was a whole farm. It's 235 acres. And then he bought one south of Effingham and I forget what we call that. So that was another farm. So he bought whole farms. Dad had about 2,000 acres at one time.
- DePue: Wow. A lot of this farm purchasing was happening—if you came along in forty-four and he bought a farm then, your brother came along a few years earlier, obviously not during the height of the Depression, I would think. It was during the Second World War when prices were up a little bit?
- Hartke: Yes. And dad did not go to the military because—I don't know why. I know all of his brothers did.
- DePue: But being a farmer, that's an essential industry, too.
- Hartke: Right. And so maybe because he was involved in farming with grandpa, that he did not go. But I know Uncle Lenny, Uncle Joe, Uncle Herby all did go. Uncle Clarence. They all went.
- DePue: Were they farming, as well?

- Hartke: If so, they were farming with their dad. Maybe just as a hired hand on the farm. I'm not sure. But I know that they all eventually farmed from the Hartke farm in the Bishop Creek area. Uncle Roman was the oldest. I don't remember stories about him, anyway, being in the military.
- DePue: Once your parents are done having children, how many are there?
- Hartke: There are ten of us.
- DePue: And what was it like growing up in a big family on a farm?
- Hartke: Oh, you learned to share a lot, learned to have a lot of patience. You did a lot of hard work. It was a lot of togetherness, I can tell you that. Early on, mom and dad wanted a big family and they knew that, and the house they were living in with grandpa and grandma was not going to be big enough, and so they bought another farmhouse, which was a mile across the section. I wish I had pictures of it. I know we do. Can't find them. But a steam engine pulling this house across the field and pulling it right up next to the original house that was on the family farm. Pulled it about ten to twelve feet, as close as they could get it, and so then dad put a bathroom as a hallway between the two houses. And one house upstairs had three bedrooms, and that's the one they pulled across the section, and that was the girls dorm.
- DePue: The house that had been pulled over?
- Hartke: Right, right. And it was just pulled on the foundation. They didn't put a basement under it. I think they should have, but they didn't. But they put a bathroom between the two houses, and the the boys' dorm, of course, was above the dining room and another big living room and a kitchen. That was the main space. And the dining room was huge because we had not only the ten kids, mom and dad, grandma, because grandpa had passed away in forty-four, forty-five, and then a hired hand. We always had a hired hand that lived with us. So there were fourteen around the dining room table.
- DePue: Every night?
- Hartke: Every night, every day. It was quite an experience. It really was.
- DePue: How old were you when they put these two houses together?
- Hartke: I probably was maybe one. I don't know. It was moved with a steam engine. Or maybe it was done before that. I don't remember. I seem to remember pictures of this team of people, a team—ten, twelve guys and a steam engine and rollers they used.
- DePue: Yes, that's quite an operation.
- Hartke: Oh, man, yeah. I don't know if I would have tried to move a two story house today across diagonally, across the section, getting all the neighbors to agree. There was one creek they had to cross. And keep it together, you know.
- DePue: Did either of these houses have indoor plumbing before they did this?
- Hartke: No. Neither one did. And so...
- DePue: So that's another reason for doing this major renovation.
- Hartke: Well, I don't know if that was or not, but I do know that... I remember having an outhouse, and the boys, that's what we got to use. The outhouse in the...

- DePue: Even with this brand new bathroom, you had to use the outhouse?
- Hartke: Well, yes, because it was a pretty complicated place in the morning. Everybody trying to use this thing, and especially the girls. The girls were pampered, I guess you might say, and they got to use the indoor plumbing in this. Guys had to use the outside.
- DePue: So your dad said it's more important for the young ladies, who are probably getting up into junior high and high school, to have—
- Hartke: Right, right.
- DePue: —the option of using that indoor bathroom, huh?
- Hartke: Right. Well, plus the fact that dad milked cattle and the girls were out there helping with the milking in the morning. Us younger guys, I'd guess you'd say Jerry, and Frank and I, and Pat—Pat didn't see a whole lot of the milking being done. Yes, the girls got to use the indoor facilities.
- DePue: Well, tell me about the chores, especially the chores you had to do early in the morning, maybe.
- Hartke: My early morning chores, since I was one of the littler guys, when we had the dairy cattle, I climbed the silo and shoveled the silage out for some twenty-five or thirty dairy cattle that we had. Usually the heifers and the bull and whatever. But I got scoops of silage out or forked the silage out down the shoot and then delivered it with a wheelbarrow to the cattle to be fed. Also fed a lot of hay, and then while the milking cows were in their stanchions, I did a lot of bedding. My brother Frank and I crawled into the loft, get two bales of straw down and maybe two bales of hay in the bunk. I forget what exactly amount. But that was some of my chores, everyday chores. Brother Frank, I know, was relegated to the chicken house and picking up the eggs. He did not want to be a farmer after that experience, so okay, that's fine.
- DePue: Well, how about the girls? Did they get their share of chores?
- Hartke: Oh, they did. Of course, they were older. With a dairy operation, we had some beef cattle. There was lots of baling that had to be done, and they get to do that. Usually two of the girls, I would say Margie—Mary Lou, I'm not sure about. Margie and Sally did a lot of the milking. Putting together the milkers was a good task. I think Pat did a lot of that. That was one of the things; she's first up, out to the barn, put the milkers together.
- DePue: Were these mechanical milkers?
- Hartke: Yes. As a matter of fact, I just was at a family wedding this Saturday and was talking to my sister, Marge, and I talked about DeLaval and I mentioned that a couple of times, and she called me this week and says, "No, no, no. It wasn't DeLaval, Chuck, it was Surge. We had Surge equipment and we bought it from Pals Dairy Equipment in Effingham.
- DePue: Well, I'm afraid you're going to have to explain DeLaval to me.
- Hartke: DeLaval is a brand name like Surge Milkers.
- DePue: Okay, okay. Was this fairly recent innovation on the farms in this region, that you'd have the mechanical milkers?
- Hartke: Oh, I'm sure. My dad, and grandpa in particular, were innovators. Everybody liked to work for my grandpa, because one of the things that he did do for the young men that worked for

him, the high school kids. He would pile them all in some kind of automobile and make a long trip to Springfield, Illinois, to go to the state fair. You could see everything at the state fair. If you worked for Henry Hank you got a trip, a one day trip to the state fair.

DePue: And that's where they see all the new innovative farm equipment?

Hartke: New, innovative farm equipment and disks and plows and tractors and anything that's possible. My grandfather was determined that we were going to have the best. When electricity came around in this part of the country, this road going past here was CIPS, Central Illinois Public Service Company. We live a mile over and farmers that had had electricity on this road, that's fine, but they weren't going to serve everybody. That was before we had REA, Rural Electric. The cities—

DePue: This would have been early thirties, then, maybe?

Hartke: Right. The cities had electricity, but the rural countries didn't, unless you were along the line. Grandpa built a line between here and his place, one mile, holes and everything else, and paid for it so that we would have electricity and electric motors and things.

DePue: So modern in terms of the days?

Hartke: Modern, yes. Dad—Grandpa, I think, was the innovator in doing those things.

DePue: Well, once you got done with the chores, I suspect you headed off to school, right?

Hartke: Headed off to school. Plain Tree. I spent five years in a one room schoolhouse. I joke and say first grade was really tough. (laugh) No, I spent first, second, third, fourth, fifth grade at Plain Tree School, and there were twenty-eight kids that I recall from the various families around. This was a public school, one room schoolhouse, taught by Theresa Hoffman. And Elvira, Sally, Jerry, Pat, and myself—Sally. It was Vira, Sally, Jerry, Pat, and me. Five of us of the twenty-eight that were Hartke's.

DePue: Well, I would guess that there were some other families that had more than one kid going to school, too.

Hartke: Oh, absolutely. There were about five family names in the whole school, or six.

DePue: Do you think you got a good education there?

Hartke: Well, I don't know. I think so. I think it taught— You understand, a one room schoolhouse was one teacher. There was not time for six hours of class for the second grade or the first grade. Frankie Woolruff and I just could not absorb that much all day. (laugh in bg) And so you learnt responsibility. You learnt to do tasks by yourself. Math was taught, basic accounting and multiplication and addition and subtraction and division. So Theresa would give us a workbook that maybe had a hundred additional—addition problems in and so you'd sit down and you did it on your own and she was busy teaching geography. Now, if you got done with those problems, she didn't have time to see if I added 128 and 692 and 444 and got the right answer. She would hand it to my sister Sally, (laugh in bg) and Sally, then, of course would have to add them up and check those to see if I did it correctly. And if not, Sally helped Chuck get his division or addition correct.

Geography. She'd pull down a map and she'd be teaching the fifth grade geography. And, of course, your mind wanders once in a while and you're paying attention and she would ask, "Now, just exactly where is the Sahara Desert?" talking to the fifth grade class. You'd raise

your hand. (laugh) “Well, Chuck, you know the answer, but I’m talking to the fifth grade.” You know. So you would daydream a little bit. But it was always—I think, yes, it was a good education. It was.

DePue: And I would guess by the time you’re in fourth or fifth grade, the expectation is on you to help the smaller kids, too.

Hartke: Absolutely. When we finished school at three o’clock in the afternoon, the bigger boys went and got the brooms and mops and we mopped the floor and the little guys were (makes sweeper sounds) with a little dustpan and we picked it up and threw the stuff outside and two of the boys went out to the coal bin and they got coal for the next morning. One of the girls got two gallon pail of water and went out to the pump and pumped some water and so forth.

DePue: How far was it from your house to school?

Hartke: Well, you’ve heard these stories. It was—

DePue: (laugh) Well, see, I’m giving you the opportunity.

Hartke: It was two miles uphill both way in two, three foot drifts of snow. To and from. It was always uphill to school. Actually, I had two miles.

DePue: Two miles?

Hartke: It was two miles.

DePue: And how’d you get to school?

Hartke: Rode a bike or walked. Walked across the field most of the time.

DePue: Well, that’s another place where the older girls would have come in handy, 'cause I suspect they were in charge of getting all the siblings to school, weren’t they?

Hartke: Yes. And we had a whole fleet of bicycles, having ten kids, you know. But, it didn’t really take that long. When it was raining or really snowing hard, or things like that, dad may have taken us a time or two in the car and picked up the neighbors and they would call. Of course, it was a community line, 21F31, and everybody picked up when you rang extremely long or whatever, and you say, “Well, I’m driving today. I’ll pick up your kids and we’ll get them to school.” And the same thing when it was really nasty raining. Well then, we’d all be picked up and brought home.

DePue: Where did you go to school, then, after that?

Hartke: Consolidated in to Teutopolis grade school. Maple Grove, and Plain Tree, and a couple other small schools all were consolidated into Teutopolis Grade School and that took place in, oh, fifty-six or fifty-seven.

DePue: Did you get bussed there, then?

Hartke: Yes. Busses starting running throughout the entire area at that time.

DePue: Tell us a little bit about the religious foundation that your parents were giving the kids.

Hartke: Of course, this is all a Catholic community, and of course, we were born and raised and baptized and so forth through the Catholic Church here in Saint Francis’s Parish in Teutopolis. Although this was a public school, and public tax dollars, the grade school particularly were taught by Catholic nuns. It was a public school, but the Catholic nuns were our teachers. We

never had priests to be teachers. But the bus system would run about an hour early. School started at 8:30. We were there at 7:30. And we had catechism for an hour.

DePue: Oh, okay. I was going to say you can get in a lot of trouble in an hour.

Hartke: Or we went to mass at the church in the morning and then traipsed over to the grade school, which was actually, today yet, the parish owns the grade school. Today, yet. And we lease it to the public unit for school only. (laughs in bg)

DePue: Tell me a little bit about the holidays for the family.

Hartke: Oh, holidays. Actually, weekends, it was such a big family and brothers and sisters on the Hartke side, at least, we had a lot of company on weekends, and holidays were generally chores. Dad did not work on Sundays or holidays, and so those were always times when he had a time to take a nap and just relax and so forth. I do know one of the reasons I don't have chickens today—I just hated chickens, because that was one of my jobs early in childhood, five, six years old. Grandma would instruct little Chuck to get a pail of water and a broom and clean the chicken manure off of the sidewalk, so that when people came on Sunday they didn't have to step on the chicken manure.

DePue: So every weekend you're out there cleaning the sidewalks?

Hartke: Oh, yes. Scrubbing the sidewalk off. It was good training, it really was.

DePue: You should try to train the chickens to keep off the sidewalk.

Hartke: Well, that was a good... We tried to do that, as well. We had two yards. We had the barnyard, and then we had the house yard, and there was a four foot fence between the two, and of course, flowers on the inside of the house yard and weeds on the outside, I guess. I don't know. But anyway, the barnyard, the only thing that was out in the barnyard were the chickens, and they would occasionally somehow manage to fly across and get into the house yard and on the sidewalks. Believe you me, we had many emergency chicken dinners because I got frustrated at those chickens.

DePue: You know, I guess I forgot to ask you earlier. Describe the farm that you grew up on.

Hartke: Usually eighteen, twenty milk cows. Maybe fifteen or twenty beef cattle. Raised a calf and we sold him to steers or finished him out. We had maybe eight or ten brood sows and a boar. Usually 300 laying hens, which meant that we had 300 broilers that we fed out. And, usually in mid-July, we were butchering chickens. It was a typical farm. We had three hucksters that came on Monday, Wednesday and Friday to stop by bringing cereal or bread and we'd sell the eggs and so forth. We sold milk, I believe, to Pevely Dairy for a while, and then it was Prairie Farms that actually bought our milk, and they were there, I think, every day or every other day and picked up the milk and milk cans. We had, I don't know, four, five, ten gallons of milk that were picked up. Of course, the milk cooler was the greatest place to put a watermelon to keep it cold.

DePue: (laughs) Well, it sounds like—from stories I've heard from others, as well—that it was the egg and the milk money that was kind of the household money, that you could rely on a regular basis.

Hartke: Well, grandma did a lot of trading. Of course, we had an old cluck hen once in a while that wouldn't lay any and we'd sell a hen or two. We'd sell, I don't know, maybe two cases of

eggs every other day. Something like that. Two cases of eggs would be, what, thirty-six dozen. Do the math on this. But anyway, we had about 300 chickens, I know, and we sold a lot of eggs. And it was traded. A case of eggs was worth so much, and with a big family you bought a lot of cereal and oatmeal and rice and flour. I do know that mother was very good with the sewing machine and growing up, she made shirts for my brothers and I out of the flour sacks. I could tell you that. I got tired of looking like my brother Frank, but, you know, we were...

DePue: I know at that time, though, the flour sacks were designed so that the farmers could use them for that.

Hartke: Yes, absolutely. They had a pattern on them and so that's what they were for.

DePue: Big garden?

Hartke: We had a huge garden. I would say probably an acre, maybe an acre and a half of strictly vegetables. We had two or three cherry trees, we had three or four apple trees, two plum trees. We had a lot of raspberries. We did not have tame blackberries, but we picked an awful lot of wild blackberries in the Littleville area in Uncle Ben's woods and farm. Tomatoes, peas, cabbage. Canned a lot of green beans and sweet corn and peaches. Peaches we usually bought. We had a white peach tree or white peaches, but they were always wormy. I don't know why. But, they were good, but they were not like the peaches we bought at Farina, when we took the old Buick and went to Farina to get three or four bushels of apples or peaches.

DePue: But what you're describing here, Chuck, is pretty close to a self sufficient family system.

Hartke: Yeah, I think so. There were certain things that we did buy; sugar, and the flour and the coffee, those things, which is typical, I guess. But yeah. Well, it would cost a lot of money to maintain a family of ten kids and a hired hand.

DePue: Do you remember anything special about either Christmas or Thanksgiving celebrations?

Hartke: Thanksgiving not particularly so, but Christmas was always a very big event. Turkeys. Occasionally we would have a turkey that dad would buy in town, but we usually had ham. Of course, raising hogs and so forth, that was natural, I guess.

DePue: Slaughtered your own hogs?

Hartke: Oh, yeah. We slaughtered probably three hogs every winter, maybe four, and at least one steer, and did the butchering ourselves.

DePue: Right here on the farm?

Hartke: Right on the farm. Oh, yeah. Got into all that, and of course, back fat on the hog was like an inch and a half or two inches, and you cut it up into little cubes and you boiled the fat out of it or cooked it up and pressed the lard and put the lard in buckets, and that's what was used to make the crust in cherry pies and everything else that we had. It's a wonder we get older.

DePue: I'm getting hungry now.

Hartke: Yeah. Well, anyway, yeah.

DePue: But that's to say, to a certain respect, the hogs were a lot different then than they are now. They weren't nearly as lean as the hogs would be today, are they?

- Hartke: Oh, no, no, no, no. They were not because they didn't have to be because you needed the lard anyway, and the grease. And, a lot of the things, we made soap, lye soap, out of the lard, as well. So we used everything but the squeal from that hog and it's the honest to god truth. Even the cracklings, where the fat was fried out of the things, that was used as dog food for the dogs.
- DePue: Made your own sausage?
- Hartke: Absolutely. Blood sausage, as well.
- DePue: Oh.
- Hartke: Head cheese. I don't know if you know what that is.
- DePue: Yes.
- Hartke: Okay, okay. We made the head cheese and the blood sausage. That was considered a delicacy by some people, but me, I wasn't crazy about it.
- DePue: (laughs) Let's talk a little bit more about school and I'm wondering about the Hartke kids in school. Were you able to do some of the extracurricular activities?
- Hartke: Actually, grade school, not until I got to the fifth, sixth, seventh grade. Sixth, seventh grade. By then we did play basketball and, of course, we, as country kids, we were allowed to join the little league Teutopolis and we played baseball, of course. I also played in a band in grade school and high school. Started out with a trumpet in my sixth grade, I guess. Switched to a baritone and then wound up playing the trombone all through high school in the jazz band and the state FFA band.
- DePue: In high school, and start thinking about, "Okay, I'm going to graduate here eventually." What were your thoughts about what your future would be?
- Hartke: Well, I always wanted to be a farmer and so—
- DePue: Was that the expectation of your parents, as well?
- Hartke: It was the expectations. I think so, yes. And so I excelled in agricultural classes, FFA, Future Farmers of America, 4-H. We showed a lot of hogs and cattle at the county fair. Never showed at the state fair. County fair and the FFA fair. And we had some pretty good registered Chester Whites and did a good job, picked up a lot of hardware and trophies at the county fair and the FFA fair.
- DePue: But why not the state fair? You just never made the cut?
- Hartke: I don't know. We were never allowed to take our animals to the state fair.
- DePue: By your parents?
- Hartke: Altamont Fair was questionable because that was a long time. There were a lot of Lutheran girls that were very tempting over there. I don't know. I don't know.
- DePue: Certainly that would never factor into it, I would think.
- Hartke: I don't know.
- DePue: Okay. So what did you do after you graduated? When did you graduate from high school?
- Hartke: I graduated in May of 1962.

DePue: Okay.

Hartke: I was madly in love with a little gal by the name of Kathy.

DePue: High school sweethearts.

Hartke: Um-hmm.

DePue: What was Kathy's last name?

Hartke: Hoene. H-O-E-N-E.

DePue: Another good German name.

Hartke: Another good German name. Dairyman's daughter, and so we dated our senior year and then she went to Fontbonne College that fall in Saint Louis. It's an all girls school. And I gave her a diamond around Thanksgiving, I guess, or sometime in there, and we became engaged and August 10, 1963 we got married.

DePue: And you're out of high school?

Hartke: And moved into this house.

DePue: Okay. I think we probably want to take a break.

Hartke: I think so, too. I think we lost some light.

DePue: Yeah, you sure did.

(break)

DePue: We took a quick break there for technical reasons, Chuck, but I believe we got you through pretty much your high school years. You're a brand new young married man. Now you got some other responsibilities to worry about.

Hartke: Right. Kathy and I started here in August 10th, in a new home we built and planned during all spring and summer. We got married in August. Came back from our honeymoon from Idaho. Visited relatives out there. I have relatives in Idaho. She does, too. And so we got home here at the end of August and settled in our new home on the farmstead. Lots of old buildings around outside and we decided we were going to live here together for the rest of our lives.

DePue: Right where we're sitting right now?

Hartke: Right where we're sitting here right now, in this same living room.

DePue: Was this land that you owned at the time?

Hartke: I told you that earlier that dad kept buying farms and so forth. He had too much land than he knew what to do with, so he started giving land away, and he gave his daughters and sons a piece of property when they got married, and so I received—

DePue: Each one of the ten kids?

Hartke: Yes. So I received this eighty acres as a wedding gift. Not bad. (laughs)

DePue: That's a great wedding gift. Transferred the title, the whole works?

Hartke: Yes. And, of course, you could do that with the gift tax and legally, and so he did. We received this eighty acres as a wedding gift, and so I started farming it. Bought a, that spring

before I got married, bought a used super am and a 4.0 John Deere planter and got the crops in low 'n nothin'(??) and had a good harvest that year and brought my hog operation from FFA, which I had, let me see, twelve sows, six gilts and a boar. Brought them over here and I started raising feeder pigs and sold those to my dad and my brother, Jerry, who lived at another farm in Island Grove and the first year that we were married, first full year, I raised a thousand feeder pigs, expanding my operation, the gilts and so forth. First full year.

DePue: What was the time to market for those pigs?

Hartke: Oh, eight weeks. For feeder pigs. I just raised them to thirty-five, forty pounds, and then would sell the feeder pigs.

DePue: Let somebody else finish them off.

Hartke: Yes. Because I didn't have the finishing floor or the capability of doing that at all.

DePue: When your father gave you the eighty acres, you said you came here, was there already a house and some outbuildings here?

Hartke: There was an old barn, there was a block chicken house over here, there was a little garage, there was an old house that was built in—I don't know when. Probably the early 1900s.

DePue: So then these things were vacant at the time you came here.

Hartke: Well, no. Dad always rented this farm to either—Well, Uncle Leonard lived here, Uncle Herby lived here, cousin Joe lived here, Leroy Orner lived here, Lenny Schumaker lived here. This was a starter farm for a lot of them, because all these guys that I mentioned left here after two or three years and bought their own farm, either in this community or in Neoga or north of town here, north of—This is a starter farm, I guess. And so John Flaherty, who lived next door, lived here for a short period of time and he went and bought his own farm. So we tore the house down and built a new house. This is going to be my...

DePue: When did that happen?

Hartke: 1963.

DePue: Okay. So right after you got here?

Hartke: When I knew this was going to be my farm, six months before I got married, we tore the old house down and started building a new house.

DePue: So you started right with— I would assume you had to take out a loan to build the new house.

Hartke: No. There's another story. My grandfather was an entrepreneur. He bought a car dealership during the Depression in Effingham in a warehouse. Anyway, he went out of the business of selling cars and then leased the warehouse to a beer distributor. And the beer distributor paid rent, and he didn't want the money, and so he said, "I wanna put the money in a trust for my grandchildren." He didn't know how many he had yet. And so he died in 1945 and there were seven of us then, so from 1945 until 1963, all the money, the rent on this warehouse, was put in to a trust fund, divided ten ways equally between my brothers and sisters. That trust fund, when I got married, through savings bonds and whatever else they did, that trust fund, put a \$21,000 savings bonds to Charles A. Hartke. I cashed the savings bonds and built this house. This is a \$21,000 home in 1963.

DePue: Well, the family was very generous.

Hartke: We're Germans.

DePue: Hardworking Germans.

Hartke: Hardworking Germans, and I didn't know I was wealthy until—I never have been wealthy, I just—

DePue: But you've always been comfortable.

Hartke: Well, I've always worked very hard. Following year, Kathy and I bought 155 acres from my sisters, who had part of a deed of 155 acres that dad gave them. So I bought it from them.

DePue: And started to build your own farm up from there.

Hartke: And then I had 235 acres and then a couple of years later, I bought a 40 that was with mom and dad. They wanted to sell it. They sold another 40 to my brother Phil, and I got the next forty. And then I got to looking around and in, I guess, 1972, I bought what was called the Jansen Farm, which was 140 some acres east of us, which no Hartke had ever owned before. Then a couple of years later I bought part of my brother's farm, 160 acres. My brother Jerry's farm. He wanted to sell. And I bought that and rented the rest and then I rented 114 acres of the Wessendorf place. I rented that. And then my neighbor walked over a couple of years later. John Flaherty said he wanted to quit farming and I bought his hundred acres next door and eighty-five acres in Clay County, so I wound up with about a thousand acres.

DePue: And you had the thousand acres by what year, would you say?

Hartke: Oh, ninety-two, ninety-three.

DePue: Okay. So I want to jump way back again and talk about your experiences in the Army.

Hartke: Oh, yes.

DePue: Because you were a young man at the time when there was a draft.

Hartke: There was a draft in 1966. I mean, Kathy and I had been married three years and we didn't have any children, and the draft back then, they were going to those guys that weren't going to college and single and whatever, and so there was a pecking order. And if, boy, you got out of high school in 1966, you went to college, buddy, because that would get you deferred so you wouldn't have to go to Vietnam. You had good grades, because if you flunked out of college, you were going to wind up in the army within two months. Well, I'd been married, no problem, and had set my—ready for life. And I was twenty-one, twenty-two years old, and I didn't have any kids. And by golly, all of a sudden one day they ran out of these single guys that weren't going to college and whatever, so—

DePue: This was a time when Vietnam buildup was occurring.

Hartke: Vietnam buildup was occurring and so in about July, late August, I received a notice from the United States Army saying that my friends and neighbors had chosen me to serve my country, and so I had crops I had to get out and so I simply went to the draft board, and brother Jerry, who had no kids either, we both got our draft notice the same day. And so we asked to get a ninety day deferment to get our crops out. So December the fifth or December 6, 1966, I left for the United States Army, Saint Louis, Missouri, Fort Leonard Wood, took a battery of tests, went to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, for my basic training. From there, went to Fort Sam Houston, Texas, in San Antonio, for my AIT. I became a medic and so—

DePue: Is that something you had selected?

Hartke: No.

DePue: The Army selected that for you?

Hartke: They said I knew how to give hogs shots, I could give privates shots. (laughs)

DePue: What had you preferred to do? If you'd had a choice in the kind of specialty, what would it have been?

Hartke: Oh, I don't know. I didn't want to be an infantryman.

DePue: Well, Fort Leonard Wood at the time was the location where engineers were being trained.

Hartke: Right. That'd been fine. But I just took a battery of tests and you really don't have a choice when you're drafted. Here's where you go.

DePue: Two years, right?

Hartke: Two years. Right. And they kept wanting me to become an officer, go to OTS, officer training school. Sign up one more year and you can become an officer. Well, I knew back then in Vietnam second lieutenants were shot every other day over there just for the hell of it, and so I did not want to be an officer. The only thing I really wanted out of the Army was out. Well, I had been my own boss for three years, independent farmer, and the last thing I want to do is be told when to get up, when to go to bed, when to work. And I tried to tell them I was not leadership quality. I did not want to be any kind of decision making position. I just didn't have it in me. I'm not a leader, I'm a follower. I don't want to do this. I'm not going to be an officer.

DePue: But they obviously saw something in you.

Hartke: Oh, must have. I don't know. But anyway, they made a medic out of me and I spent some time in Vietnam as a senior medic working in a mobile army surgical hospital.

DePue: Were you assigned to a division?

Hartke: Yes. Fifth infantry division mechanized. That's the big red one.

DePue: First infantry division.

Hartke: Pardon?

DePue: Did you say first or fifth?

Hartke: Fifth. Fifth infantry division mechanized.

DePue: Okay, okay. Well, you said big red one. That threw me off.

Hartke: Big red diamond.

DePue: Big red diamond. Okay. I'm glad I clarified that. Did the division go over together?

Hartke: Division went together. Five thousand men left Fort Carson, Colorado about the first of August 1968.

DePue: So shortly after Tet. At the very height of the fighting there.

- Hartke: Yes. We were stationed at Quang Tri, twenty-three miles or twenty-one miles south of the DMZ.
- DePue: So I-corps area.
- Hartke: Yeah. I helped unload a lot of helicopters with wounded troops on it.
- DePue: Were you at the division headquarters?
- Hartke: Hell, I don't remember where the division headquarters was. I was at Bingham Hill. I do know that our company was strictly a medical company. We had some 280 personnel, six or eight doctors, couple of psychs, couple of dentists. All we did was put band aids on people and send them on to other places.
- DePue: You said your specific duty was to unload helicopters that were being medevacked in?
- Hartke: Yes, yes.
- DePue: Did they do any triage then?
- Hartke: I did triage.
- DePue: You did triage.
- Hartke: Yes.
- DePue: Do you care to describe what that was like?
- Hartke: It was not pretty. Guys were shot in the jungle and they're in shock, they've had their morphine out in the field, they're brought in and we just made a quick once glance over to see where in the world they were hit. If they would survive, they were given every opportunity. If they weren't, they were put back on the backburner a little bit.
- DePue: Now, having to make decisions about triage, these are life and death decisions, I would think. It would essentially—
- Hartke: There was always a doctor there to overrule. But when a chopper came in, you said, "Hey, Doc, this guy—make an decision on this one."
- DePue: He needs to be first.
- Hartke: Yes, he needs to be first. This guy's got a bullet hole through his ear. He's (In audible) let him sit under a tree a while. One day I had an extra arm.
- DePue: An extra arm?
- Hartke: Had this gurney, litter. It was taken off the helicopter. The guy had a wounded leg and he had a bleeding arm, but between his legs was laying an extra arm. Nobody came in missing an arm that morning. So you go figure it.
- DePue: What was your parents' reaction about you being in 'Nam?
- Hartke: They were not happy campers about it but, you know, that wasn't the only son that was over there. Brother Jerry, who got the draft notice the same day, between August and December when I left, he had his name in for adoption through Catholic Charities and they called and here he had a baby boy. I didn't.
- DePue: So he didn't go?

Hartke: He didn't go.

DePue: What was Kathy doing during that time?

Hartke: Kathy came with me to San Antonio for advanced training and I got to leave the base every night and go see her, but I wound up on base every night, sleeping on base. And we finished there and I got moved to Colorado, Colorado Springs, Fort Carson. She moved to Colorado with me. And then when I went to Vietnam, she came home. She stayed at her mom's a little while, and then she says, "Why am I doing this? I've got a house to live in. I'm going to move back here." So she moved back here.

DePue: Who was taking care of the farm at the time?

Hartke: I rented the farm to my brother Phil, and we rented the house out to another couple, young couple who was just married.

DePue: Tough for her to be here kind of by her herself while you're overseas and worry about you every day?

Hartke: Right. Well, she didn't hear from me at all. I don't think she ever got a letter from me. But I wrote one every day, but they all came when I got home. See, I was just there twenty-eight days.

DePue: Why such a short time?

Hartke: Military intelligence. They're really smart about things. They trained me to fight in the jungle, they trained me to be a medic, and when I got over there, I figured that was not a good place to be. It was hot, it was steamy, lots of bugs around, people were getting shot. Not a healthy place to be. So I told my CO I was going to apply for an early out. There were a lot of guys getting out in September to go back to school. Serve twenty-one twenty-two months. And I'd only had three months to serve yet. Hey, I want to go home myself. We need food to keep this war going. We needed wheat and I needed to get home and sow my wheat. And my CO looked at me and laughed. He said, "No way in hell would the United States Army grant you an early out to go home and sow wheat." I said, "Well, got to have it sowed right after the Fly Free Day," which is October. "I got to get my equipment all lined up, my drill and so forth, and prepare my soil. Probably take me thirty days. But if I got out on September the sixth, that would be fine. That'd be ninety days early out, that'd be great." And so he says, "You know, they need a good laugh at the Pentagon. Why don't you just go ahead and fill out this request and send it in." And so I did, and by golly, they approved it and so I wasn't going to argue with them.

DePue: Would you have been extended, because you were well—Even if you had served out your two year tour, you're still well short of the one year tour that most soldiers were serving in Vietnam.

Hartke: Because I didn't volunteer and because it was a whole division that left, there were guys in that division that had less time than I. I had ninety days from the time we got there. Actually, 120 days when I got there to the time I was supposed to get out. There were guys supposed to be there only forty days, sixty days they were going to get out. They were going to get out October first, but they got sent anyway. So that's the way it was. They didn't extend those duties back then.

- DePue: Of your experience in the military, you got out a couple of months early, but looking back at it now, what did you learn out of that?
- Hartke: Great experience. I would think that for most young men, basic training, AIT, working together, understanding, cooperating and how our military works, I think can be good experience for every man. It'd be a good deal.
- DePue: Do you think it changed you at all, especially that short time that you're in Vietnam and doing what you were doing?
- Hartke: Hard question to answer. I don't know. I think it made me calloused a little bit, once in a while. Maybe cynical of government, some of the stupid moves they make. Government is a real problem and I don't want to ever have anything to do with it again.
- DePue: That's what you came out thinking?
- Hartke: Uh huh.
- DePue: And before that time, you were probably the typical idealistic kid growing up in America about that?
- DePue: No, I wasn't crazy about the Vietnam War. I saw it as a no-win situation. I knew it was politically motivated before I ever left. But I wasn't going to go to Canada. I'm a better American and I would do what I had to do, and I did. Wasn't crazy about it. But if I were called, I'd do my duty.
- DePue: Okay. What I'd like to do now is to take a break and we'll pick it up and the next session here we're going to talk about farming as a young man and getting into politics as a young man. So I look forward to that, Chuck.
- Hartke: Okay.

(End of Audio File One)

(Begin Audio File Two)

- DePue: This is part two of our interview with Chuck Hartke. Good afternoon.
- Hartke: Good afternoon.
- DePue: You were right about that restaurant. They had good tenderloins there. So thank you for that recommendation. We've talked a lot about year early years. We just discussed your involvement, your being drafted in the army, and the short time you spent in Vietnam, and we talked a little bit about the process you went through in building the farm. But I want to talk quite a bit more about your life on the farm, as well. When you came back from Vietnam, what was the intentions you had? What you envisioned for your farm?
- Hartke: Well, I always wanted to come back here and raise kids, and raise hogs, and raise corn and soybeans and I really felt that politics screwed up two years of my life and I really didn't want to have anything to do with politics ever again. And, so I just dedicated myself to do my very best. We had some notes, we had some expansions, we had some new barns we had put up. We wanted to pay for those things. We wanted to buy some machinery and equipment and modernize things just here a little bit from that super am that I bought to start with. And so I just dedicated myself to being a good community citizen. Paid my taxes, painted a fence, and stayed at home and raised my family. While we were in the army, I adopted my son Chris out

in Colorado. We got back here, we knew we wanted a little girl, and so we applied through Catholic Charities and we got out daughter Kim. So we had a boy and a girl, perfect little TV family, mom and dad, and so we decided that we would just become farmers and good citizens.

DePue: Why hogs? And you grew up on a farm. You had dairy cattle, you had beef cattle, you had hogs, chickens. You had everything.

Hartke: Well, we kind of evolved, I guess, on the family farm. When the girls got married and left, Jerry and I decided we were not going to do this crazy thing, like get up at 4:30 in the morning and milk cows twice a day, never go on vacation, and we felt that hogs was just as lucrative and you could make money raising hogs as well as milking cows. It was also a time evolving—there where you either had to have fifty cows or a hundred cows or you just weren't going to do it, just make it, and I couldn't see myself milking a hundred cows day in and day out. And so we decided, "Fine, we'll go into the hog production." We were good at it. We showed good hogs, we had good breeding stock, and so I was just going to raise hogs.

DePue: Did you stay on the end where you just had the breeders?

Hartke: Actually, we, first four or five years of my married life, six years, seven years, we just raised feeder pigs and then I sold those feeder pigs to anyone who would buy them. Mainly my dad or my brother Jerry. Sold to a few other customers. But I finally got so, "Well, if they're making money at it, why can't I just finish them out?" and so we put up a finishing unit to start finishing out the hogs and did this in, I think, about 1970 or something like that.

DePue: Can you describe the finishing unit? 'Cause this is a time, I believe, that there is quite a bit going on in terms of the hog industry.

Hartke: We looked around just a little bit at some of the Cargill units that were being up. Long front, slat sloped. But I looked at these things, why not a pit, and so I had one of the first finishing units that had a pit underneath of it for finishing hogs in confinement. And so we built the slats ourselves, laid them in place over a four foot deep pit and it was quite innovative. And we raised a lot of very good hogs on a sixteen by thirty-two pen with a feeder out front with slats and liquid manure and kept them high and dry and clean all the time. It was a good operation.

DePue: You say this was innovative for the time?

Hartke: Yes. I think I had one of the first slatted hog operations in the county.

DePue: How many hogs were you finishing a year?

Hartke: We were raising about a thousand head a year as feeder pigs, and so we decided to finish those hogs out myself.

DePue: And from birth to finishing, how long?

Hartke: Farrow to finish, took about six, six and a half months.

DePue: So you're putting through about 500 at a time, then?

Hartke: Actually, I was farrowing. At one time, we kept expanding the operation to where I had about 300 sows—

DePue: Wow.

- Hartke: —and you do the math. Three hundred—if I had 300 sows, two litters a year, that was 600 litters times eight pigs. That’s close to 5,000 head of hogs per year, farrow to finish.
- DePue: That you’re cycling through.
- Hartke: That I was cycling through.
- DePue: Was that one of the largest in this area at the time?
- Hartke: It was at one time, yes, because it was complete farrow to finish. Now, there were a couple over in the Altamont area that were a little bigger, but then it got to be just a lot of work, lot of work. Trying to breed and farrow and wean and then rebreed twelve to fifteen sows every week, fifty-two weeks a year.
- DePue: Were you growing all the feed on your farms?
- Hartke: I was growing all the feed here, putting it into bins. In 1976, I made things a whole lot easier. I put in an elevator leg, the stationary mix mill, and then I hooked all the barns together with this flex line pipe that ran above ground and I took the feed from dialing the corn and the soybean meal to the other ingredients, just dialing it like you would a set in the oven, and it would put 1,600 pounds of corn metered in and 300 pounds of soybean meal, salt and pepper and cinnamon and everything else you added to the operation.
- DePue: The secret recipe, huh?
- Hartke: Yes. You balanced your ration. And then you simply dialed it and then I flipped some switches and sixteen motors started off in sequence and it would deliver it all the way, some 900 feet into the feeders. And so it eliminated my grinding and delivery of feed every day.
- DePue: Now, you have to tolerate a city kid asking some of these questions. Did you mix both the corn and soybeans in the process before it got to the trough?
- Hartke: Oh, yeah. It was all mixed right at the mill. There was a big auger that ran relatively fast to deliver so much corn every minute. Let’s say it delivered sixty pounds of corn every minute. Well, you only needed about one-sixth that of soybean meal. So there was a smaller auger that ran just a little slower and it would deliver ten pounds of soybean meal, and then there was another auger of the same size, but it ran real slow, and it would put the salt and pepper and the minerals in. So you simply dialed it. In this batch of feed, I want 1,600 pounds of corn, 300 pounds of soybean meal, 100 pounds of this, 100 pounds of that. Four different ingredients and I would just turn a switch. Now, after this made so many resolutions, I’d have a ton of feed.
- DePue: Did you purchase this?
- Hartke: Yes.
- DePue: Or is it something you kind of designed yourself?
- Hartke: No. I purchased it. It was called a mix mill and as long as everything was set right and the moisture was okay and the motors were running, the belts weren’t slipping, it was good. As long as there weren’t rocks or bolts in the corn that came through the mill to tear up things, it was great.
- DePue: Well, this is the logical time in my mind, at least, to ask you the question... Looking at your hand, you’ve lost one of the digits here.

- Hartke: Well, I did that when I was still using a tractor and a feed grinder. One morning early January, cold out, frost on the belts, and I don't know if my auger had a guard on it or didn't have on when it was manufactured, but I do know I was smart enough to figure that if the belts were slipping, the belts were loose. And they ran yesterday when I ground feed, so they must be just a little wet with frost. If I grab a hold of that belt and just give it a little tug to start, it'll take off, and I was right.
- DePue: (laughs) You weren't laughing that day?
- Hartke: No. It took off and I had a pair of leather gloves on, insulated gloves, yet it tore that knuckle off and finger. So that's how I lost my finger.
- DePue: But that's to illustrate just how dangerous farming was.
- Hartke: It is.
- DePue: And it still is today.
- Hartke: Yep. It's a very dangerous occupation.
- DePue: What did you do? I mean, with that many hogs in operation, obviously they're producing a lot of manure. How did you process the manure?
- Hartke: Liquid. We hold it. We had a liquid honey tank, manure tank. We would suck it out of the pits with a big six inch hose, the liquid manure, and we'd take it and spread it on the fields.
- DePue: Okay. I know that there's been an awful lot of discussion now with these mega farms, especially these huge hog operations, where that is the issue that the farmers have to deal with. Was what you were doing at that time rather routine?
- Hartke: It was rather routine and no one thought it was odd or that the neighborhood smelled because they had hogs, too. They had dairy cattle and everyone knew, "Gee, you know, we live in the country and those are country smells," and there are certain times of year when you just put up with it. You could drive for fifty miles to the west or fifty miles to the east every spring and that's all you were going to smell for 150 miles. Now, it seems strange. "Oh, what is that smell?" "Well, that's hog manure," or "That's dairy cattle," or "That's beef cattle," and they're emptying the barns for spring. That's organic fertilizer. It is fertilizer. Come on, now give me a break. Yeah, there's a spring smell in the air and it happened every spring everywhere, because everyone had livestock. If they didn't have cattle or hogs or chickens, they had horses to get to town. They had horses to do their farming and they had manure from those horses. Ninety percent—I'm guessing—ninety-five percent of the farmers back when had livestock. They may not have been all in the concentration we see today, but... Yes.
- DePue: So from your perspective today, it's hard to comprehend how the public has reacted to that issue?
- Hartke: Absolutely. I simply don't understand it. Sure. No one likes the smell of a municipal sewer plant. Try to do without it. I mean, it's going to be there. Do it without smell. Well, fine. When I was a member of the General Assembly going through this process of the Livestock Facilities Management Act, it got me that people didn't understand this is a part of what we do. Now, most types of manufacturing produces some type of odor. If you're producing tires, there's an odor. If you're printing newspapers, there's an odor. If you're—
- DePue: Processing soybeans.

- Hartke: —Processing soybeans, there's an odor. And I said on a committee, "You know, if we're going to outlaw smell, I really think the Decatur ADM in Staley's ought to shut down and move, because that town stinks once in a while. And everybody was shocked that I would say that. Well, yeah, but they wouldn't want to give up ADM or Staley simply because they're paying the twenty, twenty-five dollar an hour union jobs. But when they get out in the country, they've been watching Green Acres too long, they just want it to be rosy and nice smelling and everything just perfect out in the country. But they want their bacon, they want their pork chops, they want their hams, they want their steaks, they want their fresh country eggs.
- DePue: And they want the money that all of this brings to the state, as well, I would think.
- Hartke: Right, right. But they don't want the smell. They don't want to put up with this. Tax base in counties are well taken care of with the livestock operation. You know, they're taxed.
- DePue: I know that you were innovative in a lot of ways, too, with not just the things that you already talked about. Can you talk about one or two of the things that you possibly worked on that got you a patent, as well?
- Hartke: Well, I forget what year it was. About 1980, I guess, I broke my ankle. I've had bad ankles my entire life, and so I had an operation to try and fix some problems I had in my ankle. Went to Mayo Clinic. And I come back and I sat on the hog fence and I was watching my pigs and my pigs were laying under a heat lamp and all of a sudden mama started to grunt a little bit and all the pigs would get up and they would nurse. They'd all get up and nurse at the same time and then they'd laygo down again and an hour later they'd go nurse again. Well, they're all there. Now, the feeding industry or the hog industry had little, bitty feeders that they fed pigs and it was only big enough for about three pigs to standin' at one time. So if you want them to start eating, they all eat—they're used to eating at the same time. When mom grunted, they got up and they ate. And, so they were, of course, drinking their mother's milk. And that was great, because you had to put them on solid feed eventually. And so I thought what we need is a feeder so that when they want to start eating, they all eat at the same time. It's long enough. So I built a feeder that was forty-two inches long and had places for eight pigs to stand there and eat. All right, now, the feed that you're starting them on is like a pabulum. It's a good tasting sweet feed with honey and whey and sugars and some corn and soybean meal and it's really—riboflavin. Really tastes good. I mean, I could eat a handful myself. You have these little pigs you want to start eating. But it would turn sour when it got wet or humidity and it's like taking your baby bottle you're feeding your baby and you're setting it on the kitchen table. You don't put it in the refrigerator and let it sit there all day, it's going to get sour. Well, this feed does, too, and so you have to develop a feeder that's not only big enough for them to all go to, but it's easy to clean out. And, so we developed a feeder that wouldn't rust, it was easy to clean out. It's called a flip and feed stainless steel. 50—304—403—304 stainless steel. Same thing forks and knives are made out of.
- DePue: You mentioned 'we.'
- Hartke: We. I had a partner by the name of Frank Brummer. He's a welder. And so I went to him with this concept and idea and we built one. We put one together. He was a welder, I was a farmer. So we started a company called Farmweld, Incorporated. Farmer and a welder. Farmweld, Incorporated, and we started trying to sell these Cadillac flip and feed stainless steel feeders. We sold about a hundred of them in the first three years at \$125 a piece and hogs were twelve dollars. Farmers just didn't have the money. They all needed to replace their

feeders and knew it. Indestructible, stainless steel, wouldn't rust, wouldn't bend, hard, heavy, last a lifetime, but they were too high, and so as things evolved, I got another job all of a sudden in 1985.

DePue: Which we'll talk about in a bit.

Hartke: Yeah, and anyway, so I sold him my rights and everything to the thing, lock, stock, and barrel, for three grand.

DePue: Has he done okay with it since then?

Hartke: Sort of. He ran it for around twenty years, and within a year after I sold him those rights, he was selling a thousand a week and made a fortune. He's now sold to a Canadian company, the whole thing, lock, stock, and barrel, and I imagine he's worth a million or two. And I don't envy him at all. He worked hard at it.

DePue: Well, let's get to the political side of this thing. You obviously have your hands full in the operation you've described. You're more than busy managing this farm. You got a couple kids now that you're taking care of, as well. How did you get yourselves involved in politics when you had sworn coming back from Vietnam you wanted nothing to do with it?

Hartke: Well, do as I say, not as I do, you know. I got frustrated one day. I was reading the paper at night, and the county—the county board, in its infinite wisdom, was going to consider the possibility of countywide zoning and then they described a little bit what zoning was. Zoning was where you have to go into the county board, planning board, and ask their permission to put up a building, because we don't want buildings right next to the township or county road. We didn't want what they call string developments along highways, where the bus had to stop on the highways every ten feet to pick up kids. It wasn't safe and they don't want houses way over here and way over there. Fire department. It was controlled and structured growth. And so as agriculture, we just couldn't put a pond anyplace we wanted to or drain water anyplace we wanted to or put up a building that was out of the raw. You don't put up a chicken house next to town and so you don't want—a danger for society to have all these chickens there, you know. So, wait a minute. I bought this land. Nobody's going to tell me what the heck I can do with my land. I want to put up a dang barn, I'm going to do it. So I went to this. They were going to have informational meetings. So I went to one of these information meetings. I sat there and listened a while and I said, "Now, wait a minute, my friends and neighbors. I didn't go to Vietnam to fight for freedoms to allow someone else to tell me where I can put up a barn, get a permit to do it. No, absolutely not. We do not need zoning. However, I know one thing. If you never stand up and say anything, it's going to happen whether you like it or not, 'cause somebody's got it in their head and it's gone this far. So what we must do is as rural members of this county is to pack every meeting and make sure that our voices are heard. As a matter of fact, in the planning stages, we ought to make sure that we've got members on the inside working on the planning and zoning commission, just in case we have to have it, we could live with it. I don't know what that would be, but we ought to have somebody there to represent us on the county board and in these planning and zoning meetings." And my neighbors agreed.

DePue: Having said that, who did you have in mind of being on the inside?

Hartke: I didn't. I didn't at all. But my friends and neighbors came to me and said, "Chuck, would you serve on the county planning commission?" Including my county supervisor, my township supervisor. Came and said, "Chuck, you're young and so forth. You got to become involved

in this thing, because I think your heart's in the right place." Okay, fine. So I agreed to serve on the county planning commission. I was elected their secretary, and fourteen months later we presented to the fourteen townships in Effingham County a planning program for zoning, if we needed to have it. It had to be voted on by the county board. And so we went around and had hearings in all the townships, and I made every one of them, and presented the booklet of the county zoning plan and after every meeting, we took a straw vote, and it was just totally rejected. They didn't want to have zoning in Effingham County. So we went to the county board. We—the chairman, Mr. Ernest Scarby(??), who is from Bishop Township, another farmer, and myself as secretary, and we recommended to the county board that they do not adopt the county zoning plan. And they rejected it and so it was not adopted. Mission accomplished.

DePue: At that point in time, what were your political ambitions, then?

Hartke: Absolutely none. I came home here and started raising pigs and kids and so forth. The problem was I had a precinct committeeman here in Montrose that was getting old and I found out that he wasn't going to meetings anymore, and so I ran against him as a precinct committeeman, democrat precinct committeeman. And then...

DePue: Well, what led you to make that decision?

Hartke: I just thought we should have a voice in what was going on in politics and who our elected representatives would be.

DePue: 'We' being?

Hartke: We rural Illinois.

DePue: The farmers?

Hartke: Agriculture, the farmer. And so I ran against him and I won and become a precinct committeeman. I was about twenty-six, twenty-seven at the time.

DePue: I'd like to have you take a step back and very briefly explain the politics of this region.

Hartke: This area is conservative and Democratic. Strange. But very conservative, but yet Democrats. I would say at that time, this community was seventy-five, eighty percent Democrat.

DePue: Is this New Deal Democrats or even farther back than that?

Hartke: Well, maybe. All I know is sitting at the supper table one night and my grandmother got so upset because my oldest sister, Mary Lou, happened to be dating this guy, Vowen, a distant relative, I mean like fourth cousin, but doesn't she know that he's Republican? Okay, god forbid. But I thought he was a nice guy. Anyway, I grew up in a Democrat family. The Seimers(??) in Teutopolis were Republican and they're the ones that bought all the—we know, the richest people in town and the Schultz's and Diedrich's, so maybe that's why I was a Democrat. I don't know. But I just felt as long as you were a working man, you had to be a Democrat.

DePue: Can you—and maybe put you on the spot here a little bit. How would you describe at that time your political philosophy, or did you even think about having one?

Hartke: I think that I was probably a fiscal conservative and a social liberal.

Charles Hartke

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DePue: But you didn't want the government to be telling you how to run your farm?

Hartke: No, absolutely not. I wanted to have a voice in some of those decisions that were being made, because I saw a shift to more urban population than rural and unless we brought those values and so forth to the majority, we weren't going to be heard.

DePue: And I think I cut you off. We've got you now on—is it the Effingham County Board?

Hartke: Well, no, not there yet. I served as a precinct committeeman, but then my supervisor, who was a county board member, died in the bowling alley one night and he had to be replaced, so my friends and neighbors came to me and said, "Chuck, would you finish out his term?" which is a twenty-eight, twenty-seven month term.

DePue: What was his name?

Hartke: Sylvester Sarussa and he'd been a long time Democrat politician. So I agreed to take his place, so I then was serving on the county board and all of a sudden our state representative by the name of Chuck Keller decided he was going to retire, quit. His father had died and he was going to come home and take care of the Keller Oil Company, oil business, and so he waited til the Monday before the filing date of filing in Springfield to withdraw his candidacy. So we needed another candidate. Well, so he says, "Oh, my aide can take my place." I said, "I don't think so." I didn't even know who in the world his aide was, but I knew a couple other people I thought would be very good state representatives, and one's a guy by the name of Richard Bremmer, who happened to be a second or third cousin of mine. But anyway, from Bishop. And so...

DePue: You apparently had plenty of second or third cousins around there.

Hartke: Oh, yes, lots of them. Anyway, so I decided we needed to get Rich in. So I scurried around and helped and did whatever, and we got enough petitions by Monday five o'clock filing deadline, and got him to Springfield to file, to get his name on the ballot, and he was one of five.

DePue: And this is, again, on the ballot for what position?

Hartke: State representative. So we worked real hard between the filing date, which was around November, whatever, until April, whenever the primary was, to get him nominated. He was one of five running for the position on the Democrat ticket for state representative.

DePue: What year would this have been?

Hartke: 1984. No, not 1984, 1976. Had to be in seventy-six. And so in seventy-six, Chuck Keller, former state representative, still alive today and doing quite well, come up to me and said, "Chuck, what are you doing? My aide's going to win and he's going to beat your guy like an ugly stepchild. And so he's not going to win. You don't have enough money to beat me." And I said, "I know, Chuck. I don't have enough money to beat you, but I got more time than you got because you're too busy and I can go door to door for my guy and we're going to beat you. We're going to win this primary." He said, "No, no, no. You're Democratic county chairman is behind me, as well, and so are all the precinct committeeman." I said, "I'm a precinct committeeman and nobody told me I had to be for you." And so he says, "Well, I'll tell you what. Come the primary when you're running for precinct committeeman, you won't even make it anymore as a precinct committeeman. I'll run somebody against you and beat you, too." "Oh," I said, "Okay. That's fine with me. Let's go at it. And by the way," I says,

“that county chairman, I’m going to take him out, too.” I was blowing smoke there, but anyway, I did. We won and I took him out and then took out the Democratic County chairman of Effingham County and I was Democratic County chairman of Effingham County from seventy-six to 1984.

DePue: You were?

Hartke: I was, the Democratic county chairman. Not involved on the county board anymore. That had expired, I quit. Came home. Off the county zoning commission, all that out. I was the Democratic county chairman for those eight or nine years, from seventy-six to 1984.

DePue: What kind of money does a Democratic county chairman make?

Hartke: It cost me about \$3,000 a year.

DePue: (laughs) That would have been my guess.

Hartke: Yes. It cost me about \$3,000 a year going to all these dinners and whatever and traveling around and speaking. Anyway, I supported Rich Bremmer, and in 1984, Terry Bruce, who was my Illinois senator, was elected to the United States Congress. He was one of the crazy eight. Maybe you remember him. I don’t know. But anyway, he was one of the crazy eight, along with Dawn Clark Netsch and that group.

DePue: The crazy eight got the name because?

Hartke: They were eight people that were not expected to get elected to the Illinois Senate that year and they did, and so when he was elected, he was a part of the crazy eight. Anyway, he had made it to Congress. Rich Bremmer, who was our state representative at the time, politically we knew he was going to get appointed as a judge. Soon as the election was over with, whether he won or lost, he was going to be appointed a circuit judge. So two seats were available. The Illinois Senate, 54th, and the 107th representative seat. Well, being involved as Democratic County chairman for eight or nine years, I had gotten together and known all the county chairmen in the six counties, seven counties of the 107th district and most of the county chairman in the 108th district. Long story short, it came down to seventeen votes difference between the two - 108th and 107th district. I announced I wanted to be an Illinois senator, I couldn’t get enough votes, I cut a deal with Senator Bill O’Daniel. Bill O’Daniel, who was a retired state representative. He was going to take the job as state senator to finish out the two year terms of Terry Bruce, and then two more years on his own for four years, and then he was going to retire and quit and I was gonna then going to run for Illinois Senate. He didn’t do that. He didn’t quit. He kept running. But I was appointed to be the state representative.

DePue: Now, somewhere along here, from 1968, come back from Vietnam, you said, “I don’t want anything to do with politics,” to kind of being drafted at the local level to be a precinct committeeman, and then somewhere along here, it sounds like you got bit by the political bug, as well.

Hartke: I think it was my doctor’s fault in Mayo Clinic. He told me that, “Chuck, your ankles are so bad you’re going to have to find a different way to make a living, other than using your muscles and so forth. You better start using your brains.” So I couldn’t walk anymore my ankles were so bad with arthritis. This was back in 1980, I guess, somewhere in that time period. And so the opportunity arose for me to become a state legislator. It cost me \$117 worth of phone calls and gasoline making trips back and forth to—and that was a lot of money

back then—to convince these county chairman to vote for me with their weighted votes. And they did. So that one election, the election, to take the oath of office in January of 1985, along with everybody else. Won reelection again in eighty-six, eighty-eight, and ninety, ninety-two, ninety-four, ninety-six, ninety-eight. Every two years for eighteen and a half years. And then the governor was elected, Governor Rod Blagojevich, and he appointed me the Director of Agriculture.

DePue: Okay. Well, I want to spend quite a bit more time about your period as a legislator, but before we move too far into that... My impression is you certainly did not turn your back on farming, though. How did you maintain the farm during those years?

Hartke: I had some very good help. Guy by the name of Bill Jansen worked for my brother for a while. Earlier than that. I had a man by the name of Mark Gebben. Mark Gebben came on the yard here when, oh shoot, he was sixteen years old on a little moped. Lived in T-town and his dad was a wannabe be farmer. Gene Gebben married one of Joe Daeger's(??), my neighbor's daughter over here and he always wanted to farm and it was in Mark's blood. He just wanted to farm. He just wanted to raise pigs. Okay, fine. "What do you know about raising pigs?" He said, "Nothing." I said, "Good." Well, if he knew everything about it, he'd be doing it on his own. If he didn't know anything about it, he had to learn. He had to learn my way. So I taught him everything he knows about raising hogs. Mark worked for me for eight or nine years, went to the University of Illinois, graduated with a degree in animal science. Today he's past president of the Pork Producers of the State of Illinois, lives at Casey, raises all kinds of hogs. Now, that was from the hog end.

Now, from the grain end, I had Bill Jansen, who started with me. He worked for my brother Jerry first, when I rented Jerry's place, well then I rented him as well as a hired hand. Brought him up, paid him quite well. He farms now on his own and raises probably has a thousand acres that he rents or leases or owns. Combination.

DePue: So they've all done very well.

Hartke: Yeah. I took 'em in under my wing, I gave 'em total management and authority and trust here because I was gone. I couldn't be dickering in seed corn or whatever everyday to manage an operation, a hog operation. I had to trust someone and so these were two guys I did. Ron Premmer(??) is another guy that worked for me for quite a while.

DePue: What were your goals, then, when you first entered the legislature? How would you want to define success at that point in time?

Hartke: I just wanted to make sure that everything that I voted for or against was in the best interests of agriculture in general. Just not this area, but agriculture in general, short-term, as well as long-term.

DePue: Talk about the boundaries of your district.

Hartke: Start off with, there were Effingham, Clay, Jasper, Richland, Lawrence and Crawford counties, little bit of Edwards. That was 107th district. And then I went through reapportionment and it was all of Crawford, all of Lawrence, all of Clay, all of Richland, all of Effingham and then we, it really got goofy—or half of Effingham. And then it really got goofy. This was in the 108th district and then it was parts of Effingham, all of Clay, Richland, none of Lawrence, Edwards, White, Wabash, Hamilton, and Wayne counties.

DePue: And how many state legislators were there at the time?

Hartke: Well, there always has been 118.

DePue: 118. What amazes me is the geographical spread that you had for this one district in Illinois. This is a huge swath of land that you represented.

Hartke: It is. It's a huge. It's all, or parts, of ten counties going from White County, Carmi, all the way up here to Effingham.

DePue: And what's the largest city that you represented?

Hartke: To begin with, it was Effingham. Boy, I don't know what... To end it, I only had a third of Effingham, and then you got Flora and you've got Olney, 9,000, you've got Fairfield, five, 6,000. That's probably it.

DePue: But it sounds like for your entire term, the eighteen and a half years, you represented an area that was overwhelmingly dominated by agriculture.

Hartke: Right. Absolutely. But I was talking to one of my colleagues, Terry Steczo, who lives in the south of Chicago and he says he could stand on one street corner and he could wave at half of his population going to work every morning. And in the evening, if he stood there, he'd wave at the other half going home. I said, "Terry, if I stood in the center of my geographic district, I could wave at the same guy hauling manure fifteen times that day." I'd have his vote.

DePue: (laughs) But not many more votes. (both laugh) Okay. I'm wondering when you first go up to Springfield and you start meeting some of your fellow legislators, what was your reaction? What were you thinking?

Hartke: I guess I wish I'd had a college education, is one. But the longer I was there, the more I realized they put their pants on the same way I did, and it just took someone to sit and listen. You didn't have to be the great orator, but you had to be able to listen and understand, and then you'd have to trust those people that are telling you the truth and that was the difficult part. How do you know what they're saying is absolutely fact.

DePue: I probably am going to make too much of this, but I have been dying to ask you. Meeting some of the Democrats from Chicago, from a different frame of reference that they were coming from where you were at as a Democrat down here in south central Illinois, what were your thoughts on them and their political motivations and their political philosophy?

Hartke: Well, I always felt sometimes they got frustrated with me because I didn't understand where they were coming from. And you know what? I bet they were the same about me. "Hartke, you just don't understand where I'm coming from." So I started something my first year in office. I went through the first January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August and then we lost contact with them until I met 'em again in January. Back in session. I said, "We're going to do something different. We're got a lack of communication here. Lack of communication. You don't know what I'm about and I don't know what you're going, so why don't you come down and see me." And so I started what's known as a downstate legislative tour and I went to the City of Effingham and I said, "Look, we're rural. You're rural. I need some help. I want to bring all the legislators, senators and representatives, down to Effingham to show them what agriculture in rural Illinois is all about." And I went to the car dealers and I said, "Would you furnish vans?" And I went to the hotel/motel association in Effingham and the Chamber and I said, "Would you provide hotel rooms?" "Ludwig Lumber, would you buy

a hotel room for a night for a legislator?" "Yes, sure." You know, for thirty-five dollars. That's all it was back then. Now they're \$200. Then, thirty-five dollars, nice room. Put them all up in Keller's Ramada Inn____ and the first year I think I had twenty some legislators from Chicago, senators and representatives and their families, girlfriends, whoever, didn't matter to me, down here for three days. We took them out to Lake Sara, we took them to World Color Press, we took them to my farm, we took them to a dairy farm, we took them to Siemer Milling Company where we made flour. We just toured and we gave them an opportunity. "Or you want to play golf all day or you want to go fishing at Lake Sara, or do you just want to lay around the hotel?" But here's the options you have available. He says, "Well, I would like to see a dairy farm." "Okay, fine. I'll have a van pick you up at six o'clock in the morning, and you and your wife and whatever, we'll take you out to the dairy farm. Here's what you should wear." And so this is all prearranged. And so we gave the legislators a downstate perspective. Now that's done, now we're going to go over to the Smith farm, we're going to bale hay this afternoon. (BG laughter) Do you want to go along? Anyway, so we did this and the next year I had thirty-seven legislators. When's the last time you saw thirty-seven legislators downstate at anything other than a funeral? It just don't happen.

DePue: A lot of the same people second time around?

Hartke: Some, but not all. But everybody talked about it all year long when they got back. "Man, that was great." It didn't cost me a thing. And it didn't. I wined and dined them because the Chamber of Commerce here in Effingham, the Effingham County Farm Bureau, the Hotel/Motel Association, the New Car Dealers Association all picked up the tab. Breakfast, dinner, supper, whole ball of wax, anyplace they wanted to go. They wanted to go fishing, they wanted to go play golf. And a couple did play golf. That's all they did when they were down here. They enjoyed southern Illinois and just played golf.

DePue: They did reciprocate visits to the big city?

Hartke: I was invited back, but nobody ever tried to put together a tour like that again.

DePue: Did this pay dividends for you?

Hartke: Absolutely, because people then understood what I was about, what rural Illinois was about and agriculture. When I said, "You want money for your roads in Chicago, and I understand that. You got potholes. We got roads down here that are twelve feet wide, and when you meet somebody at the next bridge, you got to get because you both can't cross that one length bridge." He said, "Ah, come on." I said, "There are roads down south where we have school buses that are dust and dirt and gravel roads." "Oh, come on." So I instructed my guys, when they took them anywhere, to take the long way around and take them—and by the way, the drivers were the young farmer of Effingham County.

DePue: Sure.

Hartke: And they took them the back way to where we would go. And so, sure, they understood and it paid dividends and the respect of the General Assembly that I did represent rural Illinois.

DePue: Well, I know always a measure for some legislators is how much money you're able to bring back to the district, or pork, if you will. I mean, that's probably a fitting word in your line of business.

Hartke: Sure.

- DePue: Was that something that you tried to do?
- Hartke: Absolutely. I think that was important.
- DePue: Tell me about what the family was doing and how they dealt with you being gone so much of the time. I assume you did not drive back and forth from Springfield every day.
- Hartke: No. I stayed in Springfield. I had an apartment that I shared in Springfield with Terry Steczo for quite some time in South Cook County, and then my last was with a guy by the name of Louis Lang.
- DePue: Lou Lang.
- Hartke: Lou Lang from, of course, Skokie. And that was a very diverse setting for Lou and I. I was a Catholic white boy, conservative Democratic from downstate, Lou being a wealthy Jewish guy from Skokie, attorney at law, just somewhat liberal. But we had many very interesting discussions at night.
- DePue: Yeah. A lot to chew over every night, I would think.
- Hartke: Absolutely.
- DePue: What kind of committee appointments did you get?
- Hartke: Oh, over the years, I think I had them all. I was on the Agriculture Committee every year that I served the eighteen and a half years. Never was chairman, vice-chairman since almost day one.
- DePue: Because those were Republican years?
- Hartke: No. I was in the House and there was only two years when the Republicans controlled the Illinois House under Lee Daniels. Ninety-three, ninety-four, I believe.
- DePue: Who was the chairman of the Ag Committee all those years?
- Hartke: Oh, god. Bruce Richmond was chairman for a number of years. But it didn't matter, because I was still the senior member and leading spokesperson.
- DePue: (laughs) So are you telling me you were the dominant force on the committee?
- Hartke: I'm being very humble. I was the vice-chairman many times and senior member.
- DePue: Okay. What were some of the initiatives you sponsored or were important during that time frame?
- Hartke: Well, big issue was property tax and taxation, you know, which we were going through. Environmental concerns. The Livestock Facilities Management Act was a big one, as well.
- DePue: Can you talk about some of those in more detail for me?
- Hartke: Sure. You know on taxation, everybody was wanting to get at the agriculture because agriculture was exempt from a lot of things. One of the things that the Department of Revenue and the administration of—I want to say Edgar administration—wanted to make sure they got every tax dollar they possibly could. One of the things they were wanting to start taxing was bull semen.
- DePue: That's something normally would be at the top of your list, I would think.

- Hartke: Well, we had an audit meet at one of my local businesses here and the IRS or a revenue agent came in and said, “Look, you’ve not been paying your tax on your bull semen that you’re selling.” And the guy says, “Well, anything used in the department of agriculture production or reproduction is sales tax exempt.” He said, “Yes, but this is frozen and everything else and you sent a technician out and it’s just not natural. It’s artificial insemination and it doesn’t say anything about that in the tax code, so we’re going to tax you. If you don’t like it, suck it up.” So my guy called me, local business guy, and he said, “You know, I’m going to owe these guys \$122,000 back taxes and penalties.” And I said, “Excuse me?” Yes, well, he was selling... I don’t know if you know, but dairy semen is quite expensive and so he would have to go pay for seven years back or whatever, plus penalties. And I said, “No, nothing is more natural than bull semen as far as reproduction and agriculture.” And so I went to the Department of Revenue and they says, “You don’t have the guts”—I’m going to use the term—“You don’t have the gonads to talk about this publicly.” I says, “You want to bet?” And so I took him to task and today bull semen is exempt in the state of Illinois, as well as hog semen, but horse semen is not if it’s used in racehorse production.
- DePue: But I can’t imagine what newspaper would not want to have a headline on a...
- Hartke: Charles Kuralt gave me a call early one morning when I was in the shower wanting to talk about this on *Good Morning America*.
- DePue: (laughs) And some of the other initiatives you talked about?
- Hartke: Well, we spent about two and a half, three years working with the various committees on the Livestock Facilities Management Act, which creates the atmosphere and permit process for the construction and expansion of the livestock industry in Illinois.
- DePue: And I imagine that was a very contentious issue and we’ve talked about that a little bit already.
- Hartke: Very contentious. Yes, very contentious.
- DePue: Was that an issue where you were able to find some allies on both sides of the political fence?
- Hartke: Absolutely, because when you’re talking about food production, and whether you like it or don’t like it, the smell is something you just had to put up with. And so we compromised a lot to get this bill put in place and there’s still some people who are not very happy with it. They want it to be more restrictive. I think it is a somewhat. It was a bill ahead of its time compared to what other states have. We may have lost some production to other states, but all in all, I think it was a well thought out, well balanced piece of legislation.
- DePue: Did it put some limits on the scale of some of these hog operations?
- Hartke: It did. It may have helped, or should I say, hurt some economic development in some of these counties that were so adamant. One of the good things we did is we put the control in the General Assembly and not in the county local boards hands. Although we always believe in local control, in this instance, local control would not be a good thing. Local control is available in legislation in Iowa and there have been permits requested in most counties in Iowa to produce hogs, but there’s very few counties that do, simply because local control pushes them out. There’s a lot of fallacies that say if you have livestock in the county, it hurts property values. To the contrary, in Iowa, after a research project has been done, those counties that accept livestock operations in their counties are better off with tax-based population growth and everything else because of all the jobs and activities that take place in

and around livestock operations. For those counties that have chased them out, there's no tax base. The population is leaving and the schools are having a tough time and there's just no jobs available. So the opposite is true of what people are saying, that livestock is good for the economy.

DePue: Now, you mentioned environmental issues, as well. Were you able to be involved in some environmental legislation? Not that what we just talked about isn't.

Hartke: Yeah. We talked about pesticides, insecticides, herbicides, and all these things. We know that honeybees are a very important part of reproduction. Illinois is number one in pumpkin production.

DePue: A little known fact.

Hartke: Right. There's an eighty percent probability that if you're eating pumpkin pie out of a can, the pie filling, there's an eighty percent probability that comes from Illinois.

DePue: From around Morton, most likely.

Hartke: Yes, yes, up in that area. Lots of pumpkins produced. We're also, I think, probably number one in jack-o-lantern production for Wal-Mart here in Southern Illinois, grown in Carmi. Now, pumpkin production is directly attributed to the use of honeybees and honeybees are killed with pesticides and insecticides, so there's got to be a balance here in nature that we don't kill all the honeybees. Yeah, so we worked on legislation such as that. Also, the Illinois Insurance Grain Code.

DePue: Pardon me?

Hartke: Grain insurance code here in Illinois. We have one of the best insurance programs available in any of the states in the United States and I worked with that as Director of Agriculture with the national association, state departments of agriculture, as well.

DePue: Well, that's getting a little bit ahead of our story.

Hartke: A little bit, yes.

DePue: How about finding markets for some of Illinois' agricultural products?

Hartke: Tried my very best to do that. I was somewhat held back on that, but that's ahead of myself, too, as Director of Agriculture. But, of course, we promoted livestock in Illinois since day one. Matter of fact, the first business card I ever had, was on the back side—on the front side it just says, "Chuck Hartke, hog farmer." On the back side, it says, "If you would eat more pork, hog prices would go up and I could afford a bigger business card." (both laugh) I put it on a half a card. Okay. The regular length but just cut it in half so it was about three-quarters of an inch wide.

DePue: Now, I know you were involved in an awful lot of other committees. Education, Veterans' Affairs, Appropriations, Transportation. Any work in some of those other committees that comes to the forefront for you, as well?

Hartke: Why, I think I also started as County Townships or Local Governments Committee, and I think that that's very important. Local committees and local counties and townships are actually the grassroots of what it's all about. Education is center to the growth of any community. A good school is going mean good jobs and good kids and productive citizens. All these committees

are very important, and I have served on all of them, some more than others. Transportation—without the proper roads and delivery, we wouldn't be going anywhere. There's not a committee in the Illinois House that's not important. They're all very important.

DePue: During these eighteen and a half years, did you consider ever running for higher office?

Hartke: Yes. I formed a committee to explore the possibility of running for the United States Congress to replace Congressman Glen Poshard, who lived up to his commitment of a ten year term limit, self-imposed, unlike some other politicians I know. He lived up to that commitment and quit after ten years. I thought about taking his place, formed a committee, went to Washington, DC. I spent a month out there. I only took three days, but it seemed like a month and I came back home, made a decision that it's not for me. It's too big an arena for this small country boy to handle.

DePue: That was the essence of it or was there something else you encountered out in Washington, DC that...?

Hartke: No, I just felt that it was so big and so cold and so whatever. I'd built up enough seniority here in the Illinois House that I didn't want to leave it. To go on to Washington, DC, unless you're there ten or twelve years before you ever get chairman of a subcommittee. Here in Illinois, I was chairman of whatever I wanted to be. I had enough seniority already. So I just did not want to take the chance to move.

DePue: Your accomplishment during your many years in the legislature that you're most proud of?

Hartke: I guess I was never indicted.

DePue: (both laugh) And in Illinois, that's saying something.

Hartke: That's something, right. No, I think my accomplishment is just never losing an election. Always had support of the people and support of the Speaker. Wound up as assistant majority leader. I don't know where to start with the many projects that I did bring home to the district from schools in Bridgeport to senior centers, Crawford County, to waterworks.

DePue: Would you say that farmers in Illinois are better off because of the work that you and others had taken the initiative to pursue?

Hartke: I think that farmers in Illinois ought to be really proud of the few members that they have that represent them in the Illinois General Assembly. When you look at the population of Illinois, the thirteen million people, there's only 73,000 farm families in Illinois anymore. And although the people that live in Effingham are not farmers, they are rural and we have, I guess, about a fourth of the population living in small communities in Illinois. The rest are major centers. We have about eight or nine good agricultural representatives in the Illinois House, one or two in the Illinois Senate, and they do a tremendous job holding the fort down for agriculture in Illinois. I cannot imagine why we do not have more support from our urban colleagues, simply because the lifeblood, the food and the water that are needed to sustain life, come from farms.

DePue: I think this is a softball I'm going to throw at you here.

Hartke: Okay.

DePue: 73,000 families in Illinois, that's a tiny minority of the overall state population. What's the largest industry in Illinois?

- Hartke: It's agriculture. One out of every four jobs is directly or indirectly related to agriculture, but they don't see it that way. People just don't see it that way. They take it for granted. When you see a truck running up and down the road today, whether it be milk or orange juice or a product that's started somewhere in agriculture, delivering the bread and the grocery or the plastic bags to put the bread in, that all revolves around food production and agriculture. It's very important. Or the soap that's kept things clean.
- DePue: And it's merchandise mired up in Chicago and it's the Chicago Board of Trade and it's Deere and ADM and Staley.
- Hartke: Yes, all those jobs. Right.
- DePue: Okay. One last question for this session for you. I know you can answer this one. What does it take today to be a successful farmer?
- Hartke: A very wealthy father-in-law. (both laugh) You must be a very good politician, educator, welder, electrician, engineer, financier, everything possible to be a successful farmer in Illinois. You don't have to own any land, but you better be good at managing with what you have.
- DePue: Now, you did it without attending college. Would you recommend that to your son or your son-in-law today?
- Hartke: No. No, I would not. I was born in a different era. In my graduating class, there were probably twenty-three boys out of the forty-four kids in my high school graduating class. I think there were about six or seven, girls and boys together, that went to college.
- DePue: Well, thank you very much, Chuck. It's been a blast to talk to you.
- Hartke: Okay.
- (End of Audio File 2)
- (Begin Audio File 3)
- DePue: Well, we're back for part three with Chuck Hartke, and Chuck, this is the part I've been looking forward to, the part where we get to discuss a little bit about your time as the director of the Department of Agriculture. But I wanted to ask you just a couple more quick questions about your time in the legislature. Tell me about a few of the friends that you made while you were there.
- Hartke: I made all kinds of friends, both sides of the aisle, it didn't matter. Lou Lang, Terry Steczo, Chuck Pankau, Eileen Lyons, Bill Black, the guy who used to throw things at me in the General Assembly.
- DePue: He's usually pretty vocal.
- Hartke: Yeah, oh, yeah. And, of course, Mike Madigan, Emil Jones. I know them all. Lou Viverito, Senator Sullivan now. I don't know that there's a legislator I didn't like.
- DePue: Explain to me why in the state of Illinois, legislative process is so dominated by what we call the big four.
- Hartke: The big four: Speaker Madigan, speaker of the house, been there forever; Emil Jones, president of the Senate; Frank Watson, minority leader in the Senate; and, the majority leader

in the Illinois House. Those are the big four. They're the ones that get together with the governor to cut the final deals, whether it be the budget or whether it be for education or university monies or whatever. They're the ones that make the final decision on how the pie is divided up each and every year and where those monies are going to come from. A committee of seven can get things done. A committee of twenty-five people can't decide anything, and so there comes a point where you have to sit down and say yes or no, and the top four are the ones that make the decision, with the governor's help, generally, on major issues in Illinois.

- DePue: But it seems like in Illinois that's such a more dominant feature of the way we legislate than in many other states. Would you agree with that?
- Hartke: Yeah, but we've always done it that way.
- DePue: (laughs) Well, as little bit smaller fish, somebody who obviously had a lot of influence, but did you feel oftentimes that you were cut out of the decision loop because of that factor?
- Hartke: I don't think so. I don't think I was cut out more than anyone else. And if you didn't like the process, then take out one of the four and be one of the four there. That's my philosophy. I just think if you don't like it, then fix it in your way. Go at it and get enough people to do it. Now, if I didn't like Mike Madigan, we would have voted against him and I'd have led the charge against him.
- DePue: Yes, yes.
- Hartke: But I respected him. I thought he was a father and a grandfather to all of us.
- DePue: Well, he was Speaker the day you got there, he was Speaker the day you left eighteen and a half years later.
- Hartke: That's right.
- DePue: What is it about Mike Madigan that makes him such an effective leader?
- Hartke: I don't think he forgets a thing that he's told. He's a workaholic. He has the heart and mind and soul of the institution of the General Assembly in his interest each and every day. I think he's the most honest politician that I've ever met. He knows everything that he's ever done. He'll never ask you to vote against the people of your district, and I think he has the respect of his enemies as well as his friends.
- DePue: Now, Illinois politics is the subject of much discussion since we have a senator from Illinois running for President right now.
- Hartke: Yes.
- DePue: And maybe this is a bit of an oddball question. But if you were to rank the most influential politicians in Illinois right now at the state level?
- Hartke: At the state level...
- DePue: You've got the mayor of Chicago, you've got the governor of the state, you've got Mike Madigan and Emil Jones. How would you rate them, most powerful right down the ladder.
- Hartke: Oh, it would have to be Mike Madigan.
- DePue: Is the most powerful?

- Hartke: Is the most powerful. I'd say more so than the mayor, mayor of Chicago. But he'd be number two. I think we have to look at Lisa Madigan as number three.
- DePue: Lisa? The attorney general?
- Hartke: Oh, yes.
- DePue: You haven't even gotten to the governor yet.
- Hartke: Oh, no. I think there will be a powerful, probably—Emil Jones, in my opinion, has lost some of his charisma, some of the things that he's done here lately. I like Senator Sullivan, I like Lou Viverito, I like Alexi Giannoulas, Pat Quinn. He's got more influence than the governor's got right now, I think. I think the governor just shot himself in the foot so many times, it's a wonder he can stand.
- DePue: Well, that's an insider's view on power base in Illinois, if you will. So let's go into the timeframe when you are the director of the Department of Agriculture. How did that decision come about?
- Hartke: There were several people running for governor in the state of Illinois, and one of them happened to be state representative Lou Lang, and he had announced—Of course, I'd roomed with Lou Lang for around seven, eight years, and found Lou to be very interesting, who could possibly rally the troops. So I committed to work for Lou in the election and he asked me what I wanted in return. I said, "Nothing, I just want to be your advisor. Want to give up everything and just be your advisor. I don't want to come to work every day, I just want to be your advisor and say, 'Yes' or 'no', or 'Lou, you're going crazy.'" I was ready to resign as a member of the general assembly just to do that. Anyway, then Governor Rod Blagojevich also was running and his numbers were looking pretty good and he came to me and he asked me if I would support him. I said, "Can't." I says, "I've committed to Lou Lang." He says, "Well, can I be your number two guy, then?" I said, "Sure. You want to run for lieutenant governor?" He says, "No, that's not what I had in mind." (both laugh) He said, "If Lou drops out of this race, would you endorse me?" I said, "Sure." I said, "But I want to be your director of ag." He said, "You got it."
- DePue: Did you know Paul Vallis, because he was also one of the prime candidates.
- Hartke: Sure. Sure. But he didn't know me. I mean, I knew of him. He didn't know me at all. So he never approached me, never talked to me.
- DePue: His base was strictly in Chicago.
- Hartke: Right. And so Rod was reaching out to Southern Illinois and he was reaching out to agriculture and he needed agriculture's support, and so I guess he figured if I was supporting him, I would bring a bunch of other people and—
- DePue: Did you campaign for Blagojevich in the...
- Hartke: Yes, I did.
- DePue: And how active were you on the campaign trail?
- Hartke: We went to several events, not only in the district, but outside of the district here, and spoke on his behalf, not only at the primary, but also in the general election. He also called me several times to meet him at various places: Springfield, Mount Vernon, Murphysboro, to meet him

- and to plan to be with him when he went to address an ag-related event. And I would brief him on the price of corn, the price of eggs or whatever was going on in an agriculture crisis that day.
- DePue: Did you end up then... You were his spokesman for agriculture during the entire campaign, then?
- Hartke: No, I didn't say that. What I said was—
- DePue: Then I got that wrong.
- Hartke: What I said was he would call me for advice. I was not his spokesperson for agriculture.
- DePue: Okay. Well, my apologies.
- Hartke: Well, there's a difference. To be a spokesperson, the media would come to me and say, "Here's the governor's position." No. I just advised him and then the governor was asked by the media, "What's going on with the crops in Illinois?" and Rod would say, "It's my understanding that the crops are looking very good. We're about eighty-five percent of last year," or duh-duh-duh. Or, "The price of milk has gone up recently. I've been told that it's such and such and just because." Just advisor, not spokesperson. Spokesperson, he would say, "Go talk to Chuck, will you."
- DePue: What was the nature of your relationship before he approached you? How well did you know him?
- Hartke: Rod and I served in the Illinois General Assembly together. He sat right there behind me.
- DePue: Okay. And I know he had a few years up in DC.
- Hartke: DC.
- DePue: Did you keep track of what he was doing at that time?
- Hartke: No. No. I was shocked to hear that he was running for governor back here in Illinois. He was going to give up being a congressman. Really shocked me.
- DePue: Because? Because of the national level of limelight being out there?
- Hartke: Yeah. Why come back to Illinois and run. We just had a congressman that tried that, Poshard, didn't work. Now, why would—except that he was from Chicago.
- DePue: Okay, let's fast forward a little bit, because obviously Blagojevich won the Democratic primary. I assume you continued to help him campaign through the general election.
- Hartke: Yes.
- DePue: And then he obviously came through and offered you the directorship afterwards. First, what were your thoughts and what were the nature of the discussions you had with the Blagojevich Administration about what you wanted to accomplish in that new position?
- Hartke: Well, it was a given I was the governor's choice, and it was just a matter of him making a recommendation to the executive appointment committee for me to be approved as his director. On a couple of occasions, the governor and I talked before he was governor, that I wanted to do some traveling to really promote Illinois agriculture throughout the world.
- DePue: Travel overseas, then?

Hartke: Yes.

DePue: Did you have some places in mind?

Hartke: Yes. I wanted to go to Vietnam, to China, and Japan and Korea. I wanted to go to Canada. I wanted to go to Mexico. These were our big customers. This is where we sell most of our Illinois corn and soybeans and things that we produce here. I wanted to go promote pork. Korea and Japan and China are big importers of our products. So I wanted to go there and promote these things. He came back and he said, "Well, how about India?" I said, "Well, I don't know that they eat a whole lot of pork, but I know they eat corn and soybeans. You want to go to India? Fine, we'll go to India." As it turned out, we didn't go anywhere.

DePue: Didn't go anywhere then?

Hartke: Didn't go anywhere.

DePue: When you first got the department, can you describe the shape of the Department of Agriculture when you got there.

Hartke: On December 31, 2003, there were 647 employees in the Department of Agriculture. When I got there on May 16th, there were 525.

DePue: What happened?

Hartke: 100 some, 120 some people retired, they took the early retirement. There'd been no director, 'cause Joe Hampton left in October. He took the job, as you recall, at the Department of Natural Resources. Resigned his job at \$110,000 and took a job at \$100,000 at the Department of Natural Resources. So there was no director. We went through about three or four assistant directors, acting directors, wannabe directors, whatever. I was hoping to be there by February 1st. Senator Rickey Hendon, who was chairman of the executive appointment committee, was bound and determined that he was going to get a pound of flesh out of the governor and demand that the minority hirings at the Department of Agriculture were more brought in line with what the state of Illinois is.

DePue: Uh-huh. Well I, again, I don't want to assume anything. But roughly a hundred people department just in the few months before you got there. If these are people who are taking early retirement, that also suggests they're senior people within the department. So you had a lot of holes to fill and decisions to make when you first got there, I assume?

Hartke: No. That was, I guess, another little disappointment. Those appointments were not mine to fill. That was the administration's appointment to fill. I may have been asked for advice, but those people were filled by the administration.

DePue: So the new people were people coming from the outside? They were not people who were within the department?

Hartke: They were coming from various areas of the state of Illinois who supported the governor in his election and therefore were given jobs.

DePue: Okay. What was your goal, then, walking in?

Hartke: To make sure that no matter who was there, that the personnel I had, to fulfill the mission of the Department of Agriculture, and that is to provide safe food and to promote agriculture in Illinois to the world.

DePue: Did you see those as co-equal missions?

Hartke: Yeah. Really. Number one, though, is to provide safe food. You know, for a meat inspection program and food safety program. That has to be, because we could not let that fall apart.

DePue: How big a mission or role was it for the department to oversee the county fairs and to run the state fair?

Hartke: It was one of the ten bureaus that we have. It's the Bureau of County Affairs and Horse Racing. There are 102 counties, but we have 104 county fairs, or we did. We're down to 103 now. Not all counties have a county fair and some counties have more than one. Some have two and I think there's one that has three.

DePue: Well, that's a fact I wasn't aware of.

Hartke: Cook County didn't have a county affair.

DePue: Didn't or still doesn't?

Hartke: Doesn't. Never was. Never will. Emil Jones came to me and said, "We want to have a county fair in Cook County." And I said, "Senator, you don't have that many farms. You've got Pepperidge Farm." (laughs) He wanted a county fair because the distribution of the money and the county ag premium funds, you know, goes on a population basis. Well, yeah, but they don't have a county fair in Cook County.

DePue: What are some of the other important departments within the Department of Agriculture?

Hartke: Bureau of Natural Resources, our marketing bureau, division. God, I used to know them like the back of my hand. Animal welfare section, which is big. See, maybe you don't realize every pet store in the state of Illinois is registered to the Department of Agriculture.

DePue: And I assume that means you have inspectors who go out and check on these things?

Hartke: Yes. And we have animal welfare inspectors who go out and not only check the pet shops, we also do the swap shops on Sunday afternoon in some park somewhere where they're swapping two pythons for a rat from New Guinea with three parrots from Brazil. Those illegal things that take place. We also have these people that check in on people who are hoarding cats and dogs and not feeding their horse or beating their cow or whatever.

DePue: Of the employees that you had—and this is a fairly small department as Illinois government goes—how many of them worked in Springfield and how many other locations did you have a presence?

Hartke: We have 200 people that work on the state fairgrounds in Springfield. That includes the state fair bureau. We have about a dozen people that work at Du Quoin. We have an office in Des Plaines, which is our pesticide and insecticide division. Emerald ash borer, Asian long armed beetle, these types of inspectors. We inspect all the nurseries in the state of Illinois, greenhouses, and with a population of five and a half million people living in collar counties, they've got an awful lot of nurseries up there, orchards that sell ornamental trees and shrubs and all these things. And, so we have about thirty people that work out of the Des Plaines office. We have about a hundred meat inspectors and supervisors working in a processing facility shop at the state of Illinois. We have our testing division, pesticides and insecticides, that work in Springfield. We have a marketing division of around a dozen people that promote

- the food processors in Illinois. I think we're number two or number three in food processing in the United States. Everything imaginable.
- DePue: Did you have any relationship with the University of Illinois? Because agriculture has a huge presence there. Or Illinois State, which also has an agricultural department.
- Hartke: Yes. We conversed weekly at least, if not daily, with many of the operatives at these two universities, as well as Southern Illinois University-Carbondale.
- DePue: But no direct oversight over them?
- Hartke: No.
- DePue: Let's go through some of the issues that you faced—
- Hartke: A little side story. Dean Easter, the University of Illinois Dean of Agriculture, was my son's advisor when he was going to UI.
- DePue: Very good. That probably didn't hurt them.
- Hartke: No, we knew each other quite well.
- DePue: I did want to cover some of the issues that you faced as director, and I'm sure you can bring up some more. But let's start off with the one that has to be on every director's top of the list. Budgetary issues.
- Hartke: Oh, that was always a headache.
- DePue: Rubbing your head when you say that.
- Hartke: Well, in the first place, this entire administration, the almost five years that I served him, every budget was a battle because we have so many things you want to do. In the first place, you want your employees to be happy, you want to give them a raise. Those things weren't happening in any part of the state budget. You wanted to make sure that you had the necessary funds to provide safe food, and now comes a question of promoting agriculture. Well, how much are you going to spend on promotion? Where do you want to go? How many places do you want to be?
- DePue: My guess is you have to find the money to insure the safe food supply.
- Hartke: Yes. That has to be done. Absolutely. And, so if we have to switch other parts of the budget, fine, then we have to do that. And so it was always frustrating because I could see where money was leaving the department because of some silly rule or law that some damn legislator passed eighteen and a half years sitting as vice-chairman of the House Ag Committee, and now this guy's got to implement those laws and he sure wishes he hadn't. (BG laugh) For example, we test a lot of people, I want to say 30,000 people across the state of Illinois in all occupations that want to be using and buying chemicals for the control of pests and insects, whether it be Arab pest control to whatever. We've got all kinds of chemicals you got to register and test for. And we set the testing fee for this license so damn low that anybody can afford it, and so we make up the balance out of our budget.
- DePue: So as a legislator that sounded like the right thing to do. Did you have cause to rethink that?
- Hartke: Sure. When we put in Do we want to increase fees?, then the governor caught hell, said, "There he is, not raising taxes, but he's raising everybody's fees." What's a user fee. If you

want to be an Arab pest control applicator, maybe you ought to pay more than twenty-five dollars a year to make sure that you know which chemicals you're spraying where. And so maybe we ought to charge you a fifty dollar fee for that. Well, there you go raising fees again. So in the first year we raised them some 200 fees, not just Department of Ag, across state government, and he caught holy hell and all of a sudden everything came to a screech. No more fee increase.

DePue: An edict from the governor's office, I would assume, in that respect.

Hartke: An edict from the General Assembly. They were not going to pass anymore whatever, so you don't even ask for them. You know. It's that simple. In the state of Illinois, we have a Coggeson test for horses, Coggins' test.

DePue: What test?

Hartke: Coggins', Coggsin', Coggins' test. All right. That test is taken by—you take a blood sample from a horse, all right. And so how many farmers do you know that have horses?

DePue: Well, I don't know any.

Hartke: All right. Now, here's the deal. You got a horse in Illinois, you have to have a Coggins' test for it. So you call your local veterinarian, the veterinarian comes out and he takes his blood sample and so forth, looks at it, puts a tube on the top of it, puts it in a box and you send it to the state lab. State lab, we get it, and here's veterinary Schmo just sent in this blood sample for this horse. We run the sample, we run the test and so forth, it comes back and says, "No, no problem. You don't have a sick horse." We send a notice to the veterinarian. The veterinarian fixes out the bill. "I came forty dollars out to the house, five dollars to draw the vial of blood, and five dollars to send it to the Department of Agriculture, they did the test, and here the postage was five dollars to send this thing. Here's your bill, fifty dollars, you got a safe horse." We did the test for nothing, but it cost me five dollars to have the vials and the microscopes and everything else to run the damn test at the department. We test 300,000 horses a year. This was first instituted when every farmer had three or four horses and we didn't want to spread of this disease throughout the horse population. So why don't we charge ten dollars for this test? Running it costs us a million and a half to do the test. Why don't we charge a ten dollar fee and make a million and a half? That's a fee increase. That's a fee institution, because the statute says, it shall be provided free by the Department of Agriculture, State of Illinois. So eliminate that part of the statute and we just increase the fee.

DePue: And, again, I'm assuming that in most cases you were defeated, absolutely defeated on these kinds of an issue.

Hartke: Didn't even get an opportunity to present the thing to the General Assembly.

DePue: What were some of the challenges you faced as far as insuring food safety for the state?

Hartke: Finding enough good, qualified people who want to stand in a slaughtering plant all day, cold in the winter, hot in the summer, smelling animals, watching them being slit from the throat to the bottom of their bodies, and everything spilling out, and getting people to stand there and getting paid twenty-five, \$30,000 a year to do this for a living and keep them happy.

DePue: That's barely a living wage. And they were employees of the Department of Agriculture?

Hartke: First off, they have to pass the CMS100 test for becoming a meat inspector in the state of Illinois. They got to know math, they got to know biology, they have to know a little English to write everything down they're seeing. They have to know how to follow the rules and procedures, and they have to go through a food sanitation training course down in Texas that we'll pay for, and they have to clear that. Then they come back and they work six months or three months with a supervisor who's experienced before you turn them loose on a slaughtering plant floor on their own. Okay? And they're all doing this for maybe the thirty, \$35,000 for their starting pay. Now, that's union. But once they're there a year or two, they get moved up into forty, into forty-five. Fifty's about top pay.

Now, "What do you do for a living?" "Oh, I stand in the slaughter plant where we watch chickens getting their heads cut off all day and their feathers are flying and their guts come out and it just stinks like hell. But anyway, if it's a little bit dirty, I shut the place down and everybody loves me."

DePue: And you're making thirty-five, forty...

Hartke: Yes, 40,000 a year. So the turnover rate's unbelievable. And trying to pick good, qualified people to work in these plants for that little pay is just...

DePue: And the downside is if something happens...

Hartke: Something happens, the Department of Agriculture is at blame because you're not providing us with food safety.

DePue: So a revolving door in that respect.

Hartke: Sort of.

DePue: You mentioned earlier when we had our pre-interview monkey pox.

Hartke: Oh, yeah. That was one of the first issues I had to meet when I got there. We had a pet shop that had inadvertently been spreading monkey pox up in the Chicago suburban area because they had bought some prairie dogs from a wholesale pet shop in Oklahoma that had imported some prairie dogs from Kansas and had them in the same pet warehouse as some international imports of some rats from Ghana. The rats from Ghana had been—Ghana, South Africa—had contracted monkey pox from the monkeys in the wild in the jungles of Ghana, South Africa. And the incubation period was enough time just to get over here, to where they developed that at the warehouse, then exposed the prairie dogs, and the prairie dogs were brought up here, and then the prairie dogs were then sold to families up here. And they're just cute little things, you know. (spoken in a tiny voice) The problem is they have lesions and welts break out on your skin, and if you're kissing one, it gets in your throat and you can die.

Now, problem was, up there, they had a couple, it was around the end of May, and this couple had given their daughter, a newly graduated eighth grader, going to be a freshman, a little Prairie dog for a graduation present. The parents left town, the kid threw a party. See the picture here? (laughs) Kid threw the party and sixteen little girls, sixteen year olds, sitting around. "Oh, let's see your little prairie dog." And they're all playing with this little prairie dog and they're all kissing this little prairie dog. Maybe the guys were drinking beer. I don't know. But, none of the guys got sick, but the gals did. "Who'd you have over this weekend while we were gone?" "Nobody." She could barely talk. She's in the hospital, tubes in and out of her. She's not going to explain to her parents that she had a damn party while they were

gone. Okay? The pet shop heard about what was going on, and we finally tracked down the pet shop because they were bought with cash, no MasterCard or anything like that. So when we got into the—worried about the pet shop turning the prairie dogs loose and then it infecting the other normal rats around, meaning squirrels and other mice in the neighborhood and the parks, and here we are spreading monkey pox all over south suburban Chicago. And we had to get on this now. You talk about CSI and everybody else getting in a criminal scene investigation. We had people scouring rats and back alleys and so forth around this pet shop trying to find some damn prairie dogs. We couldn't find them, never did find them, but we were catching cats and dogs and rats and doing testing to make sure that it wasn't spread. It was a headache. That was our first week on the job.

DePue: The first week on the job, could you have imagined that being the kind of thing that the director of the Department of Agriculture did?

Hartke: I didn't even remember that we governed pet shops.

DePue: So this is kind of a rude awakening, just getting this job.

Hartke: Okay. Yes. Why do I want this job. But there was lots of fun. We visited a lot of county fairs and went to every state fair and got to know a lot of good people in agriculture across the entire state of Illinois, and nationally and internationally.

DePue: One that's gotten a lot more attention in the press, at least, for the last few years—soybean rust.

Hartke: Oh, yes.

DePue: Was that a challenge for you?

Hartke: Yeah, it was a challenge, but not as tough... I mean, it was slow moving. It was like watching paint dry. It's not here yet and it's four or five years, but it's something to be very concerned about that we get it. I thought this year that we would probably get it, simply because we had strong winds out of the south, there was lots of moisture, cool. I thought it would bring it up into the Midwestern area. It keeps creeping further north, but it's not here yet.

DePue: Asian longhorn beetle.

Hartke: I came in the back door of the Asian longhorn beetle, and that's because that was started before I got there. But the emerald ash borer was my baby, and that, of course, was probably here two or three years before we knew it or could find it.

DePue: What kind of things did the department have to do because of the emerald ash borer?

Hartke: Well, we spent a lot of time and money and energy on our personnel working with the federal government. Most of the money is federal that's coming in for the emerald ash borer, as was the Asian longhorn beetle.

DePue: How about the—This seems to be a hot topic. Animal identification. Animal ID programs.

Hartke: When you look at the movement of livestock and livestock production today, it's totally different than it was ten, twelve years ago. It's not big brother interested in where in the hell you are, what you doing, how many hogs you got, how many chickens, how many cattle you got. We just want to know where they've been. If you're son came home at night after being out, and he come home with a black eye and teeth marks in his ear, and cut up, clothes all torn up, you'd say, "Where in the world have you been?" and that's all we want to know.

- DePue: Can you explain why that's important?
- Hartke: It's important because we have livestock today that are born in North Carolina, shipped to Iowa to be raised. They're born in North Carolina, raised from three pounds to ten pounds, shipped to Iowa to a nursery, and they're taken from ten pounds to fifty pounds, and then shipped to Illinois from fifty to 270 pounds and then taken to Beardstown. They're not raised, born, and slaughtered in the same location today, and so the transportation of those animals to and from, and across the state in various different directions can cause the spread of some very crazy, exotic disease that could be disastrous. You take foot and mouth disease. Very deadly. With cattle, same way. We have cattle that are born in one spot, shipped from 200 pounds to 400 pounds to a feeder prep, from 500 pounds to finishing in another location, and we could be spreading this. Truckers are traveling all over the United States, back and forth. That's why the importance for the inspection of things coming into the United States, as well, at our borders, whether they be fruits and vegetables or horticulture, decorative plants or whatever, because they could contain small bugs, diseases, emerald ash borer, all kinds of things that we don't know anything about. And if they're here and there's no natural predators to take 'em out, they're going to spread like wildfire.
- DePue: Did you have a presence up in some of the harbors in the Chicago area where I would think that's the first point of origin for some things coming in from overseas.
- Hartke: We do not directly, simply because since 9/11, Homeland Security has taken over that whole inspection service.
- DePue: I did want to go back to what we were just talking about for animal identification. Is there an international implication with being able to track these things, as well?
- Hartke: Yes. Many of the countries that buy from us are demanding animal ID or country of origin labeling, and we don't have it.
- DePue: Were some of those countries countries you had hoped to visit?
- Hartke: Yes. Absolutely. Japan, Korea, China, Vietnam. (laughs)
- DePue: Yeah. I know that's a really big issue right now for Korea.
- Hartke: Oh, yeah. In Japan, as well. In Japan, they want to know exactly who was the farmer and what did the farmer use to feed this beef that we're buying from the United States.
- DePue: So what's the resistance in the United States to that?
- Hartke: Big brother don't have to know. Farmers are conservative. You don't need to know all this information. I'm not going to report it. I'm not going to do this. I think the time will come when foddering plants will say, "Okay, where did you get this steer? When did you buy it? Whose farm was it raised on?" whether it be because of BSE, foot and mouth disease, you name it. You name the disease we haven't even heard of yet.
- DePue: Well, we're hundreds of feet away from an operation that you still run yourself for hogs. Did you have any problems with that?
- Hartke: I had no problem with it, no. Unh uh.
- DePue: Do you have some neighbors who you know have problems with it?

- Hartke: Oh, yes. I certainly do. That was one of the big controversies. I tried, as director of agriculture, to help and encourage— It's a volunteer system, the animal ID program is in the United States and in US agriculture. And it is a volunteer program. Because it's volunteer, that's just what it is. You don't have to if you don't want to. And I said, "That's fine. You don't have to if you don't want to, except that 4H, if you want to accept premiums at the county fairs in the state of Illinois for showing your animals, you have to have an animal ID number."
- DePue: There you go.
- Hartke: That didn't go over too well because I was picking on the kids.
- DePue: Well, you can't win, can you?
- Hartke: I didn't win that one.
- DePue: Here's another issue that's really been prevalent in the news here in just the last few years, and that's the whole discussion about bio-energy, especially ethanol, bio-diesel with soybeans, and even biomass. What was the role of the department in that?
- Hartke: The Department of Agriculture promoted all the bio-fuels and refineries and biomass and all those concepts and processes. However, financially we did not because that is economic development and that was under the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.
- DePue: But your official position as far as these things were concerned was what?
- Hartke: Oh, we promoted all of them and encouraged all of them in every way, shape and form that we possibly could.
- DePue: What would Chuck Hartke's position be on the efficiency of ethanol production?
- Hartke: It's the most efficient program that we have going right now for an alternative natural renewable resource. If we get the necessary enzymes to make ethanol out of biomass, meaning switch grass and so forth, I'm for it. If we can make it for a dollar and a half a gallon, I'm for it. Right now, it's not that a-way. It's five, six, seven dollars a gallon for that stuff because we haven't figured out the enzymes that are necessary to break this down.
- DePue: Well, there has been some criticism recently about ethanol production, that you have to use an awful lot of petroleum products just to produce just a little bit more in terms of ethanol products.
- Hartke: Propagated and promoted by the oil industry in Illinois.
- DePue: Okay. So you're not buying that argument?
- Hartke: (laughs) No, I'm not buying that argument at all. No, I am not, because it's costing us a ton of money, millions and billions and billions of dollars to ensure that we even have oil. Now, they don't want ethanol, okay, fine, then what is the alternative? What is the alternative? Show me an alternative. You want to go to nuclear? Fine, we'll go nuclear. No, there's some people that object to that. All right, let's go to hydroelectric. Fine, we'll build more dams and so forth. Your environmentalists will go ape over that thing. We put up windmills. Okay, great. We're going to wind up with a lot of shredded tweet. (laughs) There's always somebody that objects to something. All right, now switch grass, biomass, bio-energy, there's all kinds of things that we could do to produce energy. Right now, corn and soybeans are the most viable

option we have that are somewhat economically favorable to do so. And then there's people that object. We should not be using food for our fuel. Here in the United States. It's immoral and wrong to do so because we're taking food out of kids' mouths and we got people starving to death in this world, and we're going to put food in our cars rather than feeding people of the world. Come and get it, pay for it, fine with me. Pay for our food. Well, people screaming we got way to high food prices. That's because of the ethanol. Right now you pay for oil, or you can pay for bio-energy. "Well, we need that food." When we don't have an obesity problem in the United States, I'll start worrying about that.

DePue: (laughs) (phone rings in BG) Well, the prices of...

Hartke: You didn't hang up the phone. (both laugh)

DePue: The prices of food, right, the commodity prices for soybeans, for wheat, certainly for corn, are close to record highs as we speak. How would you explain those prices right now? And for good times on the farm in Illinois, if you will.

Hartke: I think it's absolutely wonderful. I just think that the livestock industry is the one that's hurting right now. They're not reaping the benefit of the cost of that production at all. Their cost of production is much higher than what they're receiving for their product, the bacon and the steaks and so forth. Grocery stores or somebody's making some money in the livestock industry. I do know that.

DePue: Okay. We're getting close to the end here. Did want to talk a little bit about state fairs and county fairs, but state fair in particular. What exactly is the role of your department in the state fair?

Hartke: The Department of Agriculture sponsors two state fairs, one in at Du Quoin and one in Springfield. We have the state fair grounds. A lot of activities take place there. The Department of Ag just sponsors those two state fairs. That's our role.

DePue: Is that a moneymaker?

Hartke: No.

DePue: Money drain?

Hartke: (thinking) It is money used to showcase Illinois agriculture.

DePue: Very well put.

Hartke: But when you promote things, it costs money.

DePue: Sure.

Hartke: And that's what we're doing. We're promoting agriculture not only to the non-agriculture residents in the state of Illinois, but worldwide, anybody that wants to come.

DePue: What's your view, then, in terms of how state fair and these county fairs have been evolving over time, because it seems like agriculture gets less and less emphasis with each year.

Hartke: True. I think that's correct. There's getting to be less agricultural emphasis at the state and county fairs, and that's one of the things that I tried to revive. What we need to do is make it more of an educational process for individuals. A hands-on teaching ten day seminar about

agriculture and agriculture production. How you do that with a budget that's cut every year is very difficult. You need to move into the high tech to get it done. So.

DePue: What haven't I talked about during your time, your tenure as the director of agriculture that you'd like to address?

Hartke: Oh, man. I guess the Department of Agriculture and being the director was one of the best jobs I ever had. Enjoyed almost every minute of it. It had its challenges. It had its opportunities. I just wish I'd had more of an opportunity to travel. I got to meet a lot of very good people, directors from other states, and helped to understand their problems in the national picture, as well as the international scope of food production and food processing. It was just a great experience for this poor little farm boy from Teutopolis to be director of agriculture.

DePue: And still the farm boy from Teutopolis, huh?

Hartke: I guess, I guess. Yeah.

DePue: Well, then, what led to the decision to leave the Department of Agriculture?

Hartke: Well, I'd planned on retiring this coming December, but the event of my wife contracting cancer, and I've been gone a lot the last twenty-five years, so it was time just to go home and I've got retirement in.

DePue: Take care of things at home?

Hartke: Take care of things at home.

DePue: Okay. What do you miss about the job?

Hartke: I miss the people. I really do, because over the twenty, twenty-five years in Springfield. I developed a lot of good friends and a lot of good relationships with people. Just good times as we met to meet the challenges and develop opportunities for people.

DePue: Any regrets?

Hartke: No.

DePue: Things that you look back and you think, "Well, I sure would have liked to have been able to accomplish that."

Hartke: Well, I probably should have retired about five or six years ago when I had an opportunity to invest in a bio-refinery real close, (BG laugh) and I could have made a fortune, but the ethics things had me, wouldn't let me. You weren't allowed to do that and remain in office. I should have. Looking back, I probably should have invested everything I have in a couple of these refineries.

DePue: And in terms of your time as the director, what are you most proud of?

Hartke: Well, holding things together under the challenges of the budget constraints that I had. I don't think we had any major glitch in the mission and that was to provide safe food, and I tried my very best to promote agriculture no matter where I went.

DePue: Okay, we've got a few questions just to kind of wrap things up here at the end. You've had a long career in agriculture and you've served it in many different respects. Certainly as a farmer, yourself, you've seen an awful lot of changes. From that perspective, what do you

think is the most significant change you've seen in agriculture as the average farmer in the state of Illinois during your lifetime?

Hartke: Oh, the consolidation and what's happening in the livestock business, whether it be dairy or hogs. I mean, it's just phenomenal what's happening in that arena.

DePue: I know that's especially prevalent in hogs more than cattle, isn't that correct?

Hartke: Yes. Cattle are almost nonexistent in Illinois, other than in the feeder calf operation. We have a few beef herds that raise these calves, but we just don't have it. The chickens are gone in Illinois, and we used to be huge in broiler production and laying hens. But that's been a phenomenal thing, what's happened in the last twenty-five years. I think that as far as the grain industry, the corn yields taking off have been somewhat phenomenal, going from a hundred when I was a senior—if you had a hundred bushel yield when I was a senior in high school, that was a good yield. Today, if you don't have 150, 160, there's something wrong with your production or you had bad weather. But let me tell you what my gut feeling is, as well. We haven't seen anything yet. We're going to see more of a change in agriculture in the next ten years than we will in the last hundred.

DePue: In what respect? In what way?

Hartke: Energy. Everything we do is going to be revolved around energy. We will get this little enzyme, this little bug, we'll get this figured out one of these days. And from every blade of grass that's grown out here to a corn cob that's thrown out the back of the combine to every kernel of corn, we're going to be using that to produce energy. We're going to see more energy efficient engines and motors and vehicles. We're going to see more conservation than we've ever seen before and it's all going to take place in the next ten years because the price is going to demand that we do.

DePue: Well, a huge part of what you're talking about in the increases for corn and soybeans and you can make the same kind of analogy for pork and cattle, as well, has been because of genetics, advancements in genetics. Do you see that advancing, as well?

Hartke: I do. I think we're going to see a lot of genetic engineering in livestock. We're going to see a lot more in corn and energy production. We'll have designer corn meant for oil production or ethanol production, or maybe both in the same plant.

DePue: Well, let's talk about another evolution that's been occurring in the rural America for the last five or six decades, and that's the changes that are going on in the family farm. What changes have you seen in that respect? Where do you see this heading in the future?

Hartke: Oh, I think we're gonna to see a consolidation of livestock and grain farms, both. I think we're not quite to the bottom yet, but I think we'll probably bottom out here in Illinois with some 50,000 professional—70,000 now—50,000 professional grain producers. We will wind up probably with three or 4,000 profession livestock producers. And we're probably going to have forty or 50,000 organic or natural farmers in Illinois, which is okay, too. That's fine. I don't mind that at all. But I don't think you can be an organic farmer at the scale people are talking about. It's just not possible.

DePue: Well, so many times when we bring that subject up, there's nostalgia involved in talking about the way farms and farm families used to be. Do you have any of that feeling yourself? Being of a farm family, you know, ten kids, everybody going into farming afterwards.

- Hartke: Ain't going to happen. No, I don't see nostalgia. I don't. My son raised a few pumpkins, maybe a half acre. That's enough.
- DePue: How does somebody get into farming who's seventeen or eighteen years old?
- Hartke: You marry a very wealthy only daughter of a farmer.
- DePue: And that's pretty much the only route?
- Hartke: Or you got to inherit it from somebody. I just don't see how. Boy, you better be good and make every right move every day.
- DePue: Well, you've painted a somewhat grim picture in that respect.
- Hartke: Oh, I think—Now, wait a minute. Farmer. (excitedly)
- DePue: Farmer, yeah.
- Hartke: Farmer. Actually, a dirt farmer, guy out there in the field. The investment is so great. Five, \$6,000 per acre for the land; \$200,000 combines. Where you going to get all this money? You better be a professional gambler to start with and put together one stake and gamble it right in order to even begin, or you'll be able to fast talk a lot of widows into leasing this thing and a banker to loan you the money even to get the tractor, the lease, and then you still got your operating expenses. To make it pay, you better be one good talker at seventeen years old or twenty years old or twenty-two years old to get this done.
- DePue: Well, I saw a picture of your grandson up on the mantel over here. Let's say that your grandson comes and says, "Grandpa, I think I want to be a farmer."
- Hartke: "Come on. You got a learning process. Come with me. Work with me every day here. Let's get started."
- DePue: And what would you say to him about going to school?
- Hartke: "Absolutely. You will go to school."
- DePue: And what school would you recommend?
- Hartke: He's probably going to go somewhere to become a professional tennis player.
- DePue: (laughs) So maybe he's not the best example here.
- Hartke: No, but I got a granddaughter or two there that are interested in this and so they'd better find somebody who wants to team up with that knows what they're doing.
- DePue: Is there any better place to go than University of Illinois?
- Hartke: Not that I can think of right now. Boy, that'll get me points with Dean Easter.
- DePue: Yes. Animal science or ag economics or something like that as a major?
- Hartke: Both, both. Absolutely both. They need it.
- DePue: Well, I think you've already answered this, but are you optimistic about the future of agriculture?
- Hartke: Absolutely. And we talked about what is agriculture, and you talked to me about a farmer, being a farmer. You don't have to be involved in the dirt production of agriculture to be a farmer or be involved in agriculture. Genetic engineering was a Monsanto, Dow, Eli Lilly, all

of them have spots for individuals who have the ability to open up their minds, to put things together to make food bigger, better, safer and more production. Those are farmers, as well.

DePue: Well, you've hit at just the diversity that this project that we're working on here and that you're a part of, the diversity that is agriculture in Illinois today.

Hartke: It's all of the things. When I first became a member of the General Assembly, they had things called pages, little pages. My daughter wanted to be a page and I says, "No, I'm not going to appoint you to be a page. Maybe somebody else will, but I'm not going to. I don't want you there everyday. It's not a good atmosphere for you to be in." So she was seventeen, eighteen at the time. And so she asked Senator Bill O'Daniel. Bill O'Daniel said sure, so her and Senator O'Daniel—she was a page for Senator O'Daniel. Met a little gal by the name of Tammy from Clay County. So they stayed together in Springfield, Tammy and Kim. Tammy today is the Chief Operating Officer at the Monsanto plant in Saint Louis over the six, eight state region, whatever. Her dad's a sheep farmer. She just went to the university, got a degree in engineering and biochemistry, and so she knows what she's doing and she's making about \$150,000 a year now. Is she involved in agriculture? You bet she is.

DePue: Okay. I think we're at the point now. I'll give you one other opportunity to say whatever else is on your mind here, Chuck.

Hartke: I just want to thank you very much for giving me the opportunity and hope this project is very successful and that I haven't messed up too bad in my—

DePue: It's been a blast for me. (laughs) Thank you very much.

Hartke: (both laugh) All right. Thank you.

(End of Interview)