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Abstract: Lloyd Johnson was born August 15, 1938 in Alton, Illinois. In 1850 the family farm was purchased by his great grandfather, who crossed over the river as a free man from Missouri. He purchased 200 acres outside of Alton, Illinois where the farm exists today. In the beginning, the farming was done with teams of horses. Lloyd's father (Cyrus) always used Percheron draft horses when working on the farm. To make ends meet, Cyrus also worked in the lead works starting in 1941. The farm was passed down through the male heirs of the family until it got to Lloyd. Recently, Mr. Johnson has retired and now leases the land to others while he lives on the property. He explained that the farm was very diverse when he was a child, having numerous milking cattle, preferably Guernsey or Jersey, as well as Chester White hogs. There was a large garden, and everything was canned to help feed the family during the winter. The fields that were not pastureland were planted with corn, soybeans, or wheat. In later years, it was more profitable to sell the grain than it was to feed it to the livestock. Lloyd has been involved in numerous agricultural organizations. As a youth he was in the FFA (Future Farmers of America). In this organization Lloyd learned farm business skills. In his later years, Lloyd joined the Farm Services Agency on the county level, and worked with a committee to evaluate policies. After the 1990 Black Farmers Lawsuit against the USDA, Lloyd was asked to serve on the State FSA Committee. He strongly claims to not be for one political party or another, and is the only non-partisan appointee to this political position. Lloyd has also been elected as the first black highway commissioner in his county.

Keywords: Alton, IL; Free Man; Missouri; Family Farm; Percheron Draft Horses; Lead Works; Male Heirs; Retired; Leased Land; Milking Cattle; Guernsey; Jersey;



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Interview with Lloyd Johnson

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April 10, 2008

Interviewer: Mike Maniscalco

- Maniscalco: Today is April 10, 2008. We are just a little bit outside of Alton, Illinois and we're sitting with Lloyd Johnson in his home. How are you doing today, Lloyd?
- Johnson: Fine, fine, Mike, good to have you.
- Maniscalco: Thank you. Lloyd, to start out the interview I like to start out with some very basic simple questions. So can you tell us your date of birth and where you were born?
- Johnson: I was born right here in this location August 15, 1938.
- Maniscalco: Can you tell us about your immediate family, your father and your mother?
- Johnson: My father grew up here on this farm. Born here and stayed here all of his life. My mother came from West Alton, Missouri originally. That's where her family was. And then they moved to Alton. And they both went through the local school systems here. I'm not sure my mother's age when they moved to Alton. But she was a child. So I'm not sure what schools in Alton that she went through. But she was here early in her childhood.
- Maniscalco: Now what about brothers and sisters?
- Johnson: There are ten of us. There are five boys and five girls. One of the girls has died. But the other nine of us are alive. Five boys and four girls now.
- Maniscalco: Now are they all living in the local area?
- Johnson: All but two of them. I have a sister in North Carolina and a brother in Connecticut. But the rest of us are fairly well around here. Furthest away from here immediately, I have a sister in Springfield, Illinois. But the rest of us are around here within twenty miles. Some of them were away from here in their careers but they've retired and moved back. But other than those two we're all right around here now.
- Maniscalco: Now what about your grandparents? Were they from this farm too?
- Johnson: Yes. My great-grandfather bought this farm in 1850 and so it has come down in the succeeding generations since then. My great-grandfather died rather young but he had sons and so his wife and the family continued the farm. And then in her later years two of the sons bought the ground and then later on my grandfather, their brother, bought them out. Then after my grandfather and grandmother moved to town, well, my father then and mother bought the farm. And then my wife and I bought it from my parents' estate after my dad died.
- Maniscalco: Can you tell us a little bit about your family history and how they came to Illinois?
- Johnson: I can tell you that my great-grandfather James Johnson came here as a freedman. Excuse me. As I recall he came from Virginia originally as I recall. And he was a harness maker. And so he moved around a lot. My sister-in-law, who is kind of the family historian, tells us that he came here immediately from Missouri, someplace in Missouri, around the lead mines in Missouri. But he came here in I think 1847 or so and settled just across the hill, across the creek here, about a half mile up on another hill. But they bought this farm. In fact there's

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eighty-two acres in this place and his initial purchase was 200 acres in 1850. And then he died rather young. But my great-grandmother and the family, they continued on after that.

Maniscalco: Do you have any idea what they purchased the original 200 acres for?

Johnson: If I look back in my papers I could tell you but I don't recall right off.

Maniscalco: So let's talk a little bit about your childhood and how it was growing up here on this farm. Where did you go to school?

Johnson: Elementary school one through eight there's a one-room—was a one-room country school just a mile across the woods here. And you went there through the eighth grade and then went to Alton to junior high school and high school. Obviously over here we just walked to school across the woods and the fields. When I started to junior high, we had a bus, school bus that came about a mile up the road and we caught that bus to go to town school. All of my sisters and brothers prior to that, you made it to town the best way you could. The sisters, my mother's parents lived in Upper Alton. And so the girls would go there and stay the week closer to school and then they'd come home on the weekends. My two older brothers, they walked to high school. Sometimes they would ride or drive a horse and they could leave it there at my grandparents' in their barn and all. But for the most part they went afoot from here to high school and back. It was about oh probably six or seven miles to school. But as I said when I started town school there was a school bus about a mile away. And you rode to school and back and that was a big improvement and convenience over previous years.

Maniscalco: What was the difference? Because you got to see what town kids were like and what country kids were like. What was the difference between town and country kids?

Johnson: I'm not sure that I ever thought about that, honestly. There were some rural kids that will tell you that they had problems with the transition to city schools and that they were picked on or made fun of or something like that. I never experienced that. Maybe they could see that I was such a shrimp I was no threat to them. But I never had that problem at all. And I think that during the era of my schooling in town things were a bit different from what they are today. Everybody was struggling and it's been interesting to me as I've gotten older, as I talked to kids that were town kids as you say, they were as poor as we were. We just didn't know it. I just didn't recognize that difference and it might be that that isn't something to this day that I focus on very much, the difference between people, unless there is an issue. I would suppose that if I was forced to notice a difference it would be that there were fewer of us country kids and we were from different schools in the country and so we were not clustered if you will as friends tend to cluster. And so if there is a difference it would just be that natural human tendency, the herd instinct, that people have as well. But I guess that I didn't notice that difference because I don't know that I am—if I said that I am an integrator I'm not sure that I would even understand what that means, but I don't have the timidity to mingle with people, and that may be why I've never thought about the difference. To answer your question, I've never thought before this about the difference between the city and town kids. I've just never thought about it.

Maniscalco: That's good. That's fine. That's fine. What about your friends? You mentioned that kids would cluster and group together. What kinds of clusters and cliques and friends and things were there in high school and middle school?

Johnson: Probably I notice it more, I recall it more with high school than junior high. In junior high the clusters were probably more those kids that were athletes and those kids that were music students and those kids that were nerds and that, which again is a natural herding instinct. But I was never an athlete, but I was athletic. And so I could identify with them. I was in the chorus and that kind of stuff, so I could identify with them. I am black and so I could identify with them. There were farm kids and so I could identify with them. In high school is where I think you probably notice the social clustering, as well as the programmed atmosphere to do that. As an example, in high school you had your lockers and for whatever reason it seemed that black students were always in one area of lockers. Now you have to almost accept that that is by design if you wish to dwell on that. I guess with me I was just interested in having a locker. And I guess that in that respect I'm a nerd too. Coming from the country, having a locker was a big deal. And the frightening thing was trying to remember how it was that you worked that combination, and that's what I focused on.

Now as I recall sometime or other during that period I had my locker moved to I think the third floor. And I sort of saw that as an inconvenience, if you will, because if you had to go to your locker between classes you had that five minutes or whatever it is, and we had a vocational building that was separate and apart from the main high school building, and if you had to go to your locker it was a challenge to make class on time. So again after taking this long trip I suppose to answer your question again it was the natural herd instinct to assemble with those that you most easily identify with, whether it's athletes or nerds or black or whatever the case. We tend to migrate to a similar kind. I hope that answers.

Maniscalco: That's good. That's a good answer. What kinds of games did you play as a kid?

Johnson: Get home in time to do the chores and study and get to bed before it was time to get up and do the chores and get to school. I did run track one year but we always had things to do. My dad in 1941 took a job in town and farmed and we just worked. We worked. All the time we worked. And we had responsibilities. We always had a bunch of livestock and we had field work and stuff and it just required everybody to work. And so when we got out of school we were needed and so it wasn't a case of imposed on you or anything. I had wonderful parents. My parents were just certainly greater parents than I am. But everybody had to work. They weren't mean and all that but we just had to work. But everybody around us, all the neighbors who were farmers, the kids, you just had to come home and work. So if there was a game it was a game of trying to maneuver your brother that he did more than you did. Now if you had a free minute you went out and you played some kind of ball or went horseback riding or something like that.

The only free time that we usually had was Sunday between church and five o'clock. Five o'clock was milking and feeding time. And so Sunday after dinner you had a couple of hours that neighborhood kids would get together and play ball or ride horses or fight or whatever you needed to do. That was the bulk of the games. Now during schooltime you had recess, so you played those games that you play in school, ball and that, wrestling and fighting going on. But that was about the bulk of the games.

Maniscalco: Now you mentioned one of the games you played was always trying to get your brother to do more work than you. Do you remember a certain instance when that succeeded for you?

Johnson: That was a failed attempt to be facetious. You knew what had to be done and it wasn't necessarily an assigned—other than this—we always milked twelve or so head of cows and

- you usually milked the same cows all the time. Usually. I'm not sure how that came about but each one usually milked the same cows all the time. However, if one got through with their bunch of cows and the other one wasn't through with them you just finished milking. Or there were other chores that went with it. Feeding calves or feeding the hogs or whatever else had to be done. And so sometimes that was just the natural order that should be done rather than helping finish the milking. But no that was an obvious failed attempt to be facetious.
- Maniscalco: That's fine. You also mentioned a few times that you got to ride a lot of horses. I think it was sometimes utility, sometimes a little bit of fun.
- Johnson: Those were our own workhorses. We never had any saddle horses. You just rode workhorses.
- Maniscalco: Did you have a favorite horse that you got to ride every once in a while?
- Johnson: The next one you got your hands on. I probably did. I probably did. I was rather adventurous. So I usually liked to ride the more spirited one, yeah, usually.
- Maniscalco: Is there one that you remember a little more than others? A particular one that was?
- Johnson: We had a sorrel mare, her name was Dove, that was a little crazier than the others during that period. And I rather preferred her probably.
- Maniscalco: Now you said you used the horses for work as well. Now what types of work did you use them for?
- Johnson: Oh, for field work. My dad, I don't know the year he got his first tractor. It was an iron-wheeled, one of those older tractors. I never drove that. My older brothers did but I never drove that. He bought his first rubber-tired modern tractor in 1949. He bought a brand-new DC Case in 1949. And we thought we'd gone to heaven without dying when he got that. I learned to drive on it. But we had horses all during that time. Well, in the earlier years they would have three, maybe four teams of horses. As I got to that age, I don't remember us ever having more than three teams. And then as we got more modern equipment and stuff down to two, and then finally just one team of horses. But we plowed, worked fields, we just did field work with the horses. Even after the tractor we still did field work with the horses.
- Maniscalco: What kinds of horses? Were they certain types of breeds that you particularly looked for, that your father looked for, I guess?
- Johnson: Primarily Percheron crossbreeds. They weren't pure bloodstock. And so it was whatever you had as a mare and someone had as a stallion. We never had any stallion. Never kept a stallion. But Percheron probably is the predominant breed. And then I'm sure there was some Belgian mixed in there. But I would guess if I had to answer that it would be primarily Percheron.
- Maniscalco: Was there a reason why?
- Johnson: They're a draft horse. They have an acceptable temperament. They're not like your Clydesdale and other heavier breeds. These are horses that lend themselves more to endurance. And Clydesdales are pretty bulky. And so these horses could stand the heat better and they're more adapted to that kind of work rather than heavy logging and all that kind of stuff where you're not working all the time but you need the weight and bulk and all that. But they have the body and the musculature and so forth to do regular work.

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Maniscalco: Interesting. Now to get back to your childhood a little bit more, what about your neighbors around here? Do you remember the neighbors that were around this area? How did they treat your family and how did your family get along with them?

Johnson: Everybody was in the same boat. Everybody was farmers. Everybody worked hard. We tend to focus more—especially my dad—tend to focus more on if we have an issue, for your sake we need to work this out. We're going to get along, because we're not going anywhere, and so since we have to coexist, it's best for us to do it in a favorable atmosphere, unless you want to come up second place. We've worked at getting along with people. That's not to suggest that we haven't experienced whatever else happens in human dynamics. That's not to suggest that that hasn't happened. But we probably tend to focus more on what do we do now that we're here than how we got here, if that answers your question.

Maniscalco: That's a good answer. Do you remember a specific instance where your father would negotiate problems the way you're talking about?

Johnson: Yeah. I'll tell you one of them and see if I can make it where you can record it. There was a family up the road here a ways. He was a big feeler. He had three daughters. And he came down one day and got out of his place with my brother Bill, who was my next older brother, because a fellow had called one of his daughters and he was told his name was Bill. Well, it happens that the fellow who called her just lived up the road, oh, hardly a mile. His name was Bill. And he called her. He didn't identify himself any further than Bill. So this particular guy came down here that day and certainly my brother Bill would not be an acceptable choice for his daughter. So he came down here and he challenged my brother. So when my dad came home from work that evening—he was working, got off, seven to three-thirty, so three o'clock, so when he came in, my brother told him about it, and he immediately went to see the neighbor.

I suppose the one common thing that runs through our family is that if you have an issue with the family you come to me, because if I have an issue with your family I'm not going to talk to your wife, ain't going to talk to the child or anything of the kind, I'm going to the head, the man is the one. You have the family problem. I don't. And so though my dad was a wonderful man, and a fine Christian, but when it came to issues, the buck stopped right with him. And he was a sufficient man to take care of it. But that's one. There are others. But that's one that I think reflects how he'd treat an issue.

Maniscalco: You mentioned a couple times your father had another job.

Johnson: He went to work at the American Smelting and Refining, the lead works. In '41. By that time he had nine children. He went to work there in '41 just immediately before my next younger brother was born. And it just became an economic issue that he needed to get a job outside the farm, that's all.

Maniscalco: So during that time he was farming, what sorts of things was he farming?

Johnson: We've always had livestock and small grain. Corn, soybeans and hay and that kind of stuff. And we've just always done that. Livestock and small grain.

Maniscalco: Now was the grain grown to feed the livestock?

Johnson: Primarily, primarily. There was some cash grains that were sold. We always sold wheat, because it's not necessarily a good feed grain. We would sell some corn. But most of the corn

was fed. Soybeans were sold. Again because unless they are processed they're not necessarily a feed product. Most of the hay was consumed here. And most of the corn.

Maniscalco: What types of livestock did you raise—or did he raise, I guess.

Johnson: We always had as I said six or eight horses. We always milked, we always had twelve, fifteen cows around, and calves and so forth. And we always had a bunch of hogs. I'm not sure I could give you the highest number that we ever had during his tenure. I'm not sure I could tell you. It probably didn't exceed forty, probably. But that's a lot of mouths to feed. A lot of mouths to feed. It took most of the corn and the hay and stuff. I don't remember us—oh, a bale or two here, or a bushel or two here and there. But I don't remember him selling a lot of grain, other than wheat or soybeans.

Maniscalco: Now what breed of dairy cattle?

Johnson: Mainly Guernsey. There was a period that we had Jerseys, but mainly Guernsey, or Guernsey mixed with something else.

Maniscalco: Now was there a reason for that?

Johnson: The butterfat content of the milk is high. And they are heavy producers. During that time, we weren't on this low fat kick if you will. Butterfat content was important. And obviously volume is always important. And so you get a good return from your feed input on a Guernsey. They make good returns from the maintenance you put into them. Their output is—though the Jersey would have a higher butterfat content, but your total output from a Guernsey would tend to be more than it would from your general Jersey. We sometimes had some Holstein mixed in there, but you tend to give up better butterfat content with Holstein even though they're great producers. The butterfat content is lower. And as I said, during that era butterfat was important in your milk. And so Guernseys are pretty consistent through there.

Maniscalco: Now how about the hogs? What breed?

Johnson: Initially we had Chester Whites. And Ohio Improved Chester White, OIC. They're a fat hog. And so as we went through time and people wanted, the market wanted, leaner meat, we went to Duroc and Hampshire. After I got into farming there for a while we had some Yorkshire, which is a lean meat type hog. But I would say that primarily Hampshire and Duroc with my dad.

Maniscalco: Now to kind of go back into your childhood again and more social things, you mentioned church before. That played a pretty big role in your life?

Johnson: Yes. Yes. And I suppose, to give the right answer, aside from the spiritual aspect of it—and I would want to emphasize that—but also it is a social outlet. It is a place—and I'm not sure that that has ever changed, in spite of the textbook response to that, the spiritual—it is a social opportunity. You meet there with people you have something in common with, the spiritual. But you also develop, create, maintain social relations.

Maniscalco: What sorts of social events are going on at the church?

Johnson: In our childhood era, the social was just—it was a chance that you were there with your friends and you didn't have to work. But just the social exchange that isn't necessarily in a spiritual class setting, if that makes sense. We didn't have things—we had Sunday school and church and choir rehearsal. I don't recall us ever—even though there are churches that had Bible study

classes and that kind of stuff for youth, but I don't recall us ever having that when I grew up. We may have, but I don't remember it. You did your Bible study and stuff on your own. But just the social exchange that happens when people get together and you're not in a formatted setting, if that makes sense.

Maniscalco: Now you've mentioned a few times choir. And I heard from one of our other interviewees that you're an excellent singer.

Johnson: Who is it that I have to kill?

Maniscalco: Now I can't say that.

Johnson: I have done quite a bit of singing. And though it may be taken as a degree of modesty, I've never considered that I had any special gift. But others think so. And I've been blessed that the Lord has chosen to use that as a ministry for me. But I've always enjoyed singing in groups. And then in my later years—mature years maybe I should say—I've done a great deal of solo work.

Maniscalco: Is there a specific song that's kind of your favorite?

Johnson: No. Songs are kind of like the seasons. The one you're in is your favorite one. Because you can't go back. You can't change it. I'm not sure. I'm not sure. Yeah there are songs that I think are my favorites, and some of them would be ones that I don't go around thinking that all the time. Some songs just inspire you at different times. I'm not sure that there's one song that I would say is my absolute favorite song. I'm not sure. I'm not sure there is.

Maniscalco: Well, what season are you in now then for singing? What season of song are you kind of thinking of now?

Johnson: I don't do as much singing as I did. There's a couple of possibilities. One could be that my ministry has expired. Another could be that this music that we do today that they've conveniently titled as contemporary I am just not going to do it. I don't like it. It doesn't have any meaning to me. If it does to other people then the Lord will raise people out of that era to do it. He and I are okay with the fact that I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to do it. I don't sing at any weddings anymore for that very reason. [Redacted Information]

Maniscalco: Did you do quite a bit of weddings and things like that?

Johnson: I have, I have. But everything, certainly with music, it goes through very determined eras. And the music of this era is not music to me. And so I just don't do them.

Maniscalco: That's good too.

Johnson: The Lord and I are okay with that.

Maniscalco: Well, that's good, that's good. Let's talk about your farm and this right here. How has this farm changed from your great-grandfather to your father to you?

Johnson: I have to pay the bills now. Obviously the land hasn't changed. Having worked at another job and—life has afforded me the opportunity to be able to do it with more modern conveniences than they had, and with another source to fall back on that they didn't have. My grandfather, and I would say my great-grandfather as well, even though I don't know where his money came from to do the things that he did, for a man to come from out of wherever he came during that era, for a black man to come and to purchase 200 acres is a rather astonishing thing to me.

Not only for a black man, but for a person, because it wasn't a homestead or whatever you call that. He bought it.

My grandfather was a very enterprising man. He was honest but not generous. He was very enterprising. He diversified, before that was a popular term. He always had a lot of different things going on. He raised a lot of hogs, he raised a lot of sheep and horses and stuff. And he bought land and sold it to other farmers. He put together—I couldn't tell you exactly in round numbers—but he put together parcels of land around here and sold it to other small farmers. I have a ledger of his. He kept a ledger of everything he did, including the letter of proposal to my grandmother. He wrote down everything. And they would go—there was a stockyard in East Saint Louis and he would go to East Saint Louis and buy sheep and drive them here. And he had in there the people that he hired to do it. He hired Mike and Mike came to work at seven o'clock in the morning at a certain rate and if Mike left at four o'clock instead of four-thirty he didn't get paid to four-thirty, he got paid—so much an hour to that point. If Bob came on at ten o'clock that morning. He kept those kinds of records.

And how many head of sheep or something that he bought in East Saint Louis and at what price he bought them and so forth. Including what time they left East Saint Louis driving those sheep and what time they got here, whenever the day was and so forth. And the same thing with the return. He was a very enterprising guy.

In addition to livestock and stuff, he grew vegetables, that kind of stuff. I remember my dad talking about—they used to raise some kind of beans, edible bean. And he tells about how they would, after they picked and shelled those beans and so forth, that they would wait for a windy day, and how they cleaned, you know, they threw them up some kind of way in a tarpaulin or something and relied on the wind to clean the chaff away. And they sold those beans.

But he was very enterprising. He had to quit farming as I recall his kidneys, but he had health problems. And so obviously there was no Social Security and institutional retirement and that kind of stuff during that time. And so he and Grandma went to Upper Alton. They bought a house. And they lived there as I recall about eighteen or so years before he died. He was a very enterprising man.

After he died—and I don't know how long Grandma stayed there. I know that they eventually sold the house and I know that she for a period was in Chicago with the youngest son. And I don't know the circumstances of that, whether it was the fact of her age and she needed to be or what. And I don't know if she lived here with my parents or not. I don't know. I don't recall. But I do recall there was a period that she lived in Chicago with the youngest son. But my grandfather was pretty enterprising, and I understand from my dad and other people who knew him obviously and talked about him he was extremely honest but definitely not generous. If you had \$7.11 coming to you, you were not going to get a nickel and a dime off of that. You were going to get a dime and one penny, yeah, yeah. And I've heard my dad and another cousin of mine talk about him. He always carried a coin purse. They had these coin purses that they folded over and snapped, so they put bills in there and so forth too. And if he was going to give you some money out of there he would open that, he'd turn his back to you and get your money out and turn around and give it to you. He wasn't going to—you wasn't going to look in his money, yeah, yeah.

Maniscalco: You mentioned the land here a little while ago and said the land hadn't changed. Can you describe the way the land is around this farm and the type of land this farm is on?

Johnson: In these eighty-two acres it's about half bottomland and hill. There are about twelve or so acres that are suitable almost only for pasture. It's good fertile land but it is steep in some places and it is more suitable for nothing but pasture. The other hills are tillable. And they've always been cropped. As I remember—and I don't suppose I'd ever thought about this either, but most of the hills because we needed hay were always in hay. If they were ever cropped in anything else I don't remember it. One of them here, there was a period that we had a couple of acres of raspberries. And then I know that when we made our own molasses that part of a hill here was in sugarcane.

I don't recall, whether they were or not, I don't recall until I took over the farm that they were ever in row crop. If they were I don't remember it. It's possible but I don't remember it. Which was a smart thing, because in the things that they were planted, that certainly controlled erosion for them to be in hay crops where you're not disturbing the soil. And that was prior to no-till equipment, and so they had to be tilled in order to be farmed. And so the change perhaps has been that they were smarter than I thought they were, because they did things that controlled erosion in a smart way. We needed hay and you really can't dedicate productive bottomland to that. It's more beneficial to have corn and cash crops in them than it is hay.

And the hills do just as well with hay as you would there. So they were smarter than I am, weren't they? I was able to go to row crop, because I didn't have the same requirements for hay that they did. And because you had no-till equipment where you didn't have to tear it up anyway. Notwithstanding that the Department of Agriculture kind of sent you to those kind of practices, and so you weren't allowed to tear them up. Then also what I did, oh, I'm not sure I know exactly how many years ago, but somewhere within ten years, I tilled this farm. And so—excuse me—in the process of that you erect catch basins in the hill where you slow down that flow of the water and that helps with the erosion thing. And the water goes underground instead of cutting a ditch.

And so those kinds of improvements have been—or changes, whether they're improvements or not—have been installed. We always had wells for a source of water, and I don't know if I would have been smart enough to do it otherwise, but it became a necessity when my mom—my mother died of pancreatic cancer. And so we went to city water then. That does away with the risk of running out of water or a pump failing or something like that. And to be honest, that's why we went to city water at the time. [Redacted information] [Mom died in November 1986 and in February 1987 we to admit my dad to a nursing home for Alzheimer disease. I'm sure we would have eventually installed city water, but the real reason at the time was the necessity for my mother's care.]

And so those are some of the changes if you will. We put up a more modern machine facility—building—after we came on the scene. But again that came out of necessity. You can't afford to leave combines and those kinds of—you just can't afford to leave them unprotected. You're smarter to put them inside from the weather than to leave them out.

That wasn't the case with other generation of equipment. Nobody really—stuff sat out. You take like some of your old binders and that kind of stuff. They'd throw something over it. But that's not like a building. And you just need to get modern equipment inside. And so that was a change. Those are the major ones.

Maniscalco: What about some of the buildings that were on the farm like when your grandfather, great-grandfather started and everything else? Are those buildings still around?

Johnson: No. All the buildings that are here, there are a couple that my dad built. There's nothing here from my grandfather. There's a couple buildings here that were here from my dad. The rest of 'em are buildings that we put up. A building that I suppose—no, it wouldn't have been my great-grandfather, I don't know who built it, we used to have a huge barn out here. But barns at that time were all-purpose. You had your horses, your cows, your hay, all the stuff was in that one building. And we had a great barn out here. But it just finally got to—it not only outlived its usefulness but it outlived its life. And so we took it down. But that was during my dad's era and my childhood and so forth. That barn came down. And then my dad put up a pole barn out here that is still here.

We had a separate milk barn. We had a barn separate for the cattle and the horses. It also was time for it to be razed. And so and then at that same time where the milk barn and so forth, when I went away to college my dad came to the conclusion that he didn't need to milk anymore, because he was the only other hand left here. And so he tells that he had been out doing some custom baling that day and he came in, and the milking and stuff was still here to be done, and so when he came in from milking and all, and sat down to eat supper, it was ten o'clock. And he made the announcement to my mom that night that he was through milking. And he sold the cows off and got some beef cattle and so forth. But then after that, that barn stayed there for a while, but it came down. I don't remember--and it was in the place where my machine shed is now. And I don't remember if I tore that down or not. I might have. I must have. I must have. But I don't remember it as an incident. It was just something that had to be done and you did it. You know, that's interesting. I've never thought about that. I don't know if I tore it down or not. I know I didn't tear down the big barn you're talking about because my dad—we put up this hay barn out here now. There was a corncrib that we had, and my brother and I tore that down, I remember that. There was a chicken house out here that my parents put up. I remember us building that. I tore that down. But I don't remember about the barn. I don't remember if I tore that down or not. I must have but I don't remember it, I don't remember it.

Maniscalco: Now we've talked a little bit about the farm and the fields and the pastures and we talked a little bit about the horses and the working teams. What about the tractors? We mentioned a little bit about tractors and stuff. But can you tell us a little bit about the machinery and stuff that you have here on the farm?

Johnson: I have my dad's last tractor. It's about a '51 or 2 DC Case that was his last tractor. And I restored that here a couple years ago. It had been sitting in the barn for I don't know how long. And I got it out and restored it a few years back, to my regret, because if I had known it was going to cost as much to do as it did I would have never done it. But after I was about 3,000 dollars stuck into it, you may as well go. But anyway I started farming here. My parents still lived here, but I did the farming for a good while. And I always had my own tractors. And started perhaps getting—my father never owned a combine. He always hired that done. He did have a baler, balers, several different kinds of balers and hay rakes and mowing machines and the like. But he never owned a combine. So I'm not saying that I had more modern equipment than he for any reason other than the evolution of equipment. Cars today are more modern than cars were in the twenties. But that's just because there are no more twenties cars around for you to buy. And so whatever I have had has more or less come about as a result of the evolution of the industry.

I've gone all the way from a two-row planter to a twelve-row. I've gone from my dad only had as you well know with the Case, they were all open-air tractors. Well, I was fortunate enough

that I've had several cab tractors with air conditioning and heat and radio and power steering and so forth. But again that's the evolution of equipment. It's not that I'm smarter than the generations prior. I've had combines. The same thing, with modern conveniences, human comfort. Not because I'm smarter but because that's what is today. I've also had an open-air combine where you stood out, whatever temperature it was outside, it was a little bit colder or a little bit hotter where you were standing. And you were just as dirty as—because you're standing right up over the throat of that combine, and all the dust is coming right up your—you get what it is.

But that's what I could afford at the time. So the changes, the emphasis I think that I'd want to leave with you is that I'm not sure that—I am sure that the changes have not come about because I'm smarter or more capable or anything than the prior generations. It has just been the evolution of the industry.

Maniscalco: And let's move to actually the crops that you grew here. Now you do grow corn.

Johnson: I've always been primarily cash grain crops. Corn, soybeans. I finally quit raising wheat because I have always lost money with wheat. Wheat and I just—I have never made money with wheat. So finally the light came on. Probably I ought to stop trying to grow wheat. I have been primarily corn and soybeans. Even though I had, for a good while, I fed cattle. I would buy calves and feed them out. I never kept herd cattle. I fed cattle. And so I always had, I think the most I ever had was fifty-two head. But I always, my pasture, we mow it and bale it every year. It's good, it's productive, but you can't row crop it. And so that was a good deal of my hay. And then I would sometimes—there would be other people around with hay fields that they didn't—they baled the hay and stuff but they didn't want to store it and keep it. So you can buy pretty reasonable during season rather than for them to shed it and so forth and you'd have to buy it later on in the season. So that's kind of what I've done with hay.

But I primarily have done corn and soybeans. And whenever I did sow wheat, with my luck with wheat, if I ever came out of it, I always double-cropped it with soybeans after the wheat. But I've been primarily corn and soybeans.

Maniscalco: Now through all this planting and everything, do you remember any times when there were problems with insects?

Johnson: Yeah. There's always problems with insects. And sometimes—or maybe I should say most of the times—it comes at a time that it's ineffective to do anything with it. And I think that's one of the reasons that it has driven the industry to do genetic stocks in corn now where the plant itself takes care of the insect problem. And you use a lot of chemicals and so forth instead of the genes to try to control the insects.

But yeah, one time I remember especially on a rented farm over here I used to farm, it had, I don't know, fifty some acres in it. And I'd planted it in corn and I drove by there one day. The corn was up and going good right after it was planted. You go by and check your population and so forth. And I went back a day later and there was no corn. And I was stymied. I assumed it was a chemical carryover. And so I called around and I finally got a hold of a lab, it was either in southern Illinois or Kentucky, that was willing if I got the samples down there that they would do an expedited analysis of it. And so my brother and I went over there to collect the soil samples and it was eerie. The land was alive with worms. I had missed it before. It was alive with worms. And they had taken care of about fifty acres of corn crop. Worms.

Maniscalco: Really.

Johnson: Yeah. So you go in there and you spray the chemicals and stuff and get rid of them and then you go to the next step.

Maniscalco: That's interesting.

Johnson: And they did it overnight. It doesn't take them long. You get that many wireworms and the like, it doesn't take long, it doesn't take long at all.

Maniscalco: Now crops are just really difficult, because you have insects, but then on top of that you have the weather and everything else that comes along with it.

Johnson: You have insects, you have weather, you have weeds, you have wind, you have water, and you have market.

Maniscalco: Well, can you talk about the weather first? And then we'll move to some of those other things. Do you have any stories?

Johnson: Well, I remember two years back to back I lost the entire crop on this farm with flood, with water. That not only is immediately devastating, but it takes a good while to recover—excuse me—from a crop loss. Now they have crop insurance and that helps. But it takes a good while to recover from that, and it happened to me two years back to back. But weather, like this year for instance, it's April 10, and I normally would be done planting corn by April 10. Or at least well into it. I believe in getting corn in as early as you can. But this year it's April 10, the ground is—it's still raining. And so crops are going to be reduced. Your yield is going to be reduced this year because corn relies on sun days, growing days, sun, to grow, and to promote.

And so there is a better than fair chance that corn yields will be reduced this year because their tasseling and silk periods will come when it's very hot, and unless there are some rains that carry on during the summer, beneficial rains, that the plant doesn't go into those stages—you need moisture in that plant during that period that they pollinate. You need moisture in the plant, and that's why I like to get corn in early so that it goes through that pollination process before the hot late July and August heat period. It has already set, and so I like to get ahead of that. I like to get corn ahead of July and I like to get beans ahead of August so that when they go through their pollination period they have sufficient plant moisture that they can set that pollination process.

But you take again seasons like this when it's so wet. It delays your planting. Not only delays, but it complicates it, working around wet soil and all that kind of stuff. It just really complicates it. But the other side of that is an extremely dry year. Everybody is very surprised and marvel at the yields that we had last year. Because it was so dry. We went into the spring with a moisture deficiency, and it didn't rain all summer. We didn't have sufficient summer—but yet crops did well. For some reason. But that's rare.

Maniscalco: Can you speculate why they did well?

Johnson: No. I don't know. I don't know. Because we didn't get rain. If I were forced to conclude something it would be that the Lord just decided to smile on us, but that's all I can say. There's no other reason, because we had a decided moisture issue last year. This year if crops do well I would think that it would have to be because the subsoil now has sufficient moisture in it that—there was no subsoil moisture to work back up last year. I don't know why crops did what they did. I don't know.

Maniscalco: Wow. Do you remember any years when there were really bad droughts, very memorable ones?

Johnson: I remember, I'm trying to recall the year, I think it was 1986, or '83, but it was in the eighties anyway. I remember that it was very hot and dry, so much so that it burnt the corn up. It just cooked corn. And hay fields and the like. It was just hot and dry. And what makes me remember it so much was the fact that during that time as I said growing up, we had a lot of chickens and stuff, and it was not uncommon to see an old hen just out in the open and she'd just keel over dead. Brain just couldn't take that heat. And I remember that my dad in the afternoon would have us get the livestock up and in the barn to get them out of the sunshine. We would make wallows for the hogs to get in. It was just hot and dry. And that was in the eighties. And I think it was '86 but I'm not sure exactly what year it was. But yeah you go through periods of drought.

Maniscalco: The last thing that you mentioned was markets and some of the difficulties that you have with markets. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Johnson: [Redacted information] [As farms get larger, their volume and resources accumulation allows them to participate more actively in the market pricing. I have never farmed over 500 acres, so farmers like me don't produce enough, nor can afford to hold it off the market to influence prices.]

But as you get to corporate farms or bigger farms, whatever you want to call them, where you are controlling barge load lots of grain, you get to decide, you get to participate in deciding what the market is going to be.

The small farmer, as soon as that crop matures, he's got to sell it. Number one, he doesn't have storage. Number two, he needs the money. You've got to sell it. Well, there's enough of us small hillbillies that that's going to take care of the immediate harvest season demand for grain. And the guys that are capable, they have storage, they either have the money or they have the backing and the smarts that they hold it. And so they can contract with someone to hold grain till December or January or May or whenever it's suitable. And so they can demand a better price.

We have come to a point in the ag industry that I think that since we won't police ourselves that the economics is doing it for us. The input costs, which is one of the, if not the, primary reason that I quit farming. We still own the farm but I rent it out to tenant, because no matter—and markets are great today. The prices are—it's unbelievable what corn and bean and wheat prices are today. But I'm afraid that there are some in the industry that are lulling themselves to sleep on the market price, and those people who are not engaged in agriculture think wow, those farmers are really getting off, because the prices that they're getting for their grain. And they don't know what it takes to put that grain out there. The input costs in the last four years or so have just simply been exorbitant. They just simply have. Any time that you have a thirty percent or greater input cost, I don't care what the market is, it never compensates for it. You just can't keep up.

This is nothing more than my crystal ball either analysis or forecast, whichever, I guess analysis, there has to be some intelligence that goes into it, a forecast can just be something off of your cuff. That we're going to experience in the ag industry the same thing in the next two years that we experienced in the seventies. Money was cheap. You could get money without

even asking for it. And a whole lot of guys went bust because they reached too far for money. And I think that that's the same thing that's going to happen, and I don't think it's two years away with the market that it is. Guys are looking at the market and they're not taking in consideration costs. The market is going to drop and the costs are not.

But that's the only way you're going to police the industry. It's the only way you do it. So again to get back to your—now that I've gone on this excursion—to get back to your initial question, small guys will always supply enough grain for the market's demand during harvest because they don't have storage and they can't wait for their money. I have always contracted mine, and I've always done better than the cash market at harvest time. Maybe because I'm a risk taker. If something happens and you don't produce that contracted amount you have a problem. Well, some people gamble at the boat. I gamble at the market.

Maniscalco: So just to stay on the topic of the market, do you remember anything about the markets like when your father was selling into the market or when your grandfather? Do you remember hearing any stories about it then and how it was?

Johnson: Oh, I could go back in my grandfather's ledger and tell you what markets were at the time. I remember that he talked about selling hogs you know at six cents a pound. I'm not sure. I'm sure there is things in there about grain but I don't remember what they were. I know when my dad was around, I know that a dollar a bushel for corn was pretty good. I know that soybeans during that era were certainly not three and a half. But I also know that in the recent past it hasn't been that many years before I quit that I sold corn for \$1.62 and I can tell you you just can't do that. You just can't do it. [Redacted information] [If you depend on the cash market at harvest, you will probably lose. You have to do something smart such as forward pricing (contractions) or storage in order to benefit in the affect supply and demand places or prices.]

Maniscalco: Do you think your family, like your father, your grandfather or even yourself, do you ever think that they or yourself experienced any sorts of racism through the markets ever?

Johnson: No. Through the market, no, I don't think so.

Maniscalco: In any other aspects of farming did they?

Johnson: [Redacted information] [You are always going to encounter discrimination whether racial or some other form. I find what works for me is not the fact of discrimination but how you process it.]

There's no need to go into a kennel and think you're not going to confront a dog. That's what's there. And discrimination is what's in society. There's no need to be surprised about it. You need to have already decided what you're going to do when you're confronted with it. You're either going to face it head on or you're going to try to skirt around it some kind of way. It's your decision. It's your decision. And so yes we have. But you do the next thing.

Maniscalco: Well, that's a great way of looking at it.

Johnson: Well, that's the only way I can look at it. There's no need to be surprised when you encounter it. You are going to encounter it. And you ought to know what it is you're going to do when it happens. And that's not only with discrimination, that's with a litany of things that you encounter in life. You ought to know what your response is going to be. Or you're going to fail.

Maniscalco: That's a good point. Yeah. To come back and move away from markets and things and back to the farm and livestock, I know you mentioned that your father and your grandfather had a diversified farm, and they had both beef and hogs. And at one point you had cattle. Like at the present I know you're not farming exactly here, but did you as of last year have any livestock on the farm?

Johnson: No. I had a neighbor friend of mine up here pastured some heifers in my pasture. I haven't had cattle for a couple years. Mainly again the markets and the fact that the last two groups of cattle that I had I didn't do well with them. And it just becomes much to keep on doing something that you lose at. I won't ever feed cattle again. I may get some light calves to just pasture through the winter—through the summer, I'm sorry. And background them so that they're ready to go into someone's feed yard. But I'm not going to feed cattle anymore, even if it were favorable. And you take today, you simply—corn five, six dollars a bushel, you just cannot put that in a cow. No, you're better to put it in your pocket. And especially when you look on the other end, that the fat cattle market is not twice what it was when corn was two and three dollars, you see. So I'll never feed cattle again. No. I can't do it. [Redacted Information] [The price of corn and soy beans it is more beneficial to market them than to livestock. That is especially true when you consider that the cattle market has not increased proportionate with grain.]

Maniscalco: Now I know you mentioned that you had a raspberry patch at one point. And I know you've mentioned some vegetables in the past of this farm's history. Did your parents ever have a garden on the farm here?

Johnson: Oh yeah. That's what fed us. We had a big garden, and my mom canned anything that would go in the mouth of a jar. [Redacted Information] [We always butchered our own hogs, chickens, geese, ducks, and turkeys for meat. We had milk cows, but mostly beef cows and I grew up not really liking beef primarily because we seldom ate it. We didn't have a freezer, so maybe we didn't know of other methods to preserve it.] We had the garden. And that's what my mom canned. We had fruit trees and she canned that stuff. And that's what we lived on.

Maniscalco: What types of fruit trees?

Johnson: Pears and peaches. We had a neighbor up here that—couple old women, they didn't do it, but they had cherry trees and apple trees. They were old and so they didn't do it, and they let us pick those cherries and apples. And we had—excuse me—pear trees and peach trees. That was it.

Maniscalco: What kinds of vegetables were grown in the garden?

Johnson: We had a big potato patch. Cabbage, tomatoes, green beans, okra, stuff. Stuff that grows in gardens around here.

Maniscalco: What was your favorite one that she canned? Which was your favorite to eat?

Johnson: The one that was on the table that meal. We probably had potatoes every meal. Probably. But I would guess—I've always liked green beans and corn. I like corn. And I like green beans. So I would guess that it would be one of those I guess. Never thought about that either. You just ate what was on the table.

Maniscalco: Now let me ask you about some other farming organizations. Did you belong to like any 4-H kinds of organizations?

Lloyd Johnson

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Johnson: I belonged to Future Farmers of America, ag class when I was in high school. My brother Bill was the only one as I recall that ever belonged to the 4-H. He was in the 4-H for a period.

Maniscalco: Now what about your kids?

Johnson: No interest in farming at all.

Maniscalco: Really.

Johnson: No. No, none at all. But I was in the ag in high school and FFA. Obviously you're a member of the Farm Bureau, because for the sake of the insurance and so forth you just gotta join the Farm Bureau. Which reminds me that I got a notice in there for my forty-two-dollar fee now. But I have served—the Farm Services Agency is organized by state and counties, they have county offices and then the state office, and for USDA programs. And so I have served on the Madison County committee. I am now serving and have for the past six years or so on the state committee for Farm Services Agency.

But in my growing up just FFA. I was never in 4-H. But I had a brother who was.

Maniscalco: What sorts of things did you do in the FFA?

Johnson: Well, it's ag classes obviously. And then they have you know, one of the things, not only just things that are ag-related, but they have judging contests and speech contests and so forth. The judging contest, you judge livestock and seed samples, and identify weed seeds and that kind of nonsense, that kind of activity. But you judge livestock and the like. But then they'd have parliamentary procedure contests, and speech contests and like that. And then you always had to have a class project, an animal or a crop or something that you had to have as a participating project for your grade. And so I always had crops. I don't think I ever had any livestock as a class project while I was in high school. I always had crops as I recall. [Redacted Information] [My brothers Bill and Alvin were in the FFA in high school and had crop projects too. I don't remember if they had livestock also, but I do know they had crops.]

Maniscalco: Well, next time. Can you tell us a little bit how you got involved with the FSA? [Farm Service Agency]

Johnson: Yeah, I can tell you. Yeah, I sure can tell you. You recall here some—you may not recall. But here a few years in the past, I would guess—I don't know exactly but maybe ten years ago, black farmers in the south filed a class action suit against Department of Agriculture for discrimination on programs and on lending and so forth. And so—I want to say this so I'm not critical. So as an outgrowth of that the Department of Agriculture decided that they ought to have an outreach program for those that they named as socially disadvantaged. Which conveniently included women as well. And they exacted the county committees, the county offices, that on their committee that they needed representation from the socially disadvantaged.

[Redacted Information] Ray Govillo, the county executive over here, his family and ours have been friends for generations, and so Ray called me up, hey, Lloyd, I need help. Well, we're friends, and so I had no more—I don't want to be—I don't like committees. I don't like to be on any kind of committee. So I said, "Okay, Ray, yeah I will." And so that's how I got started on that.

[Redacted Information] [Then when the Republicans came into office during the George W. Bush administration, I accepted an appointment to the state committee.]

But that's why I'm on the state committee. It has nothing to do with being a political appointment, because the party owed me something because I gave fifteen dollars or went and bought a chicken dinner or something. It has nothing to do with that. It has to do with the Republicans needed a face, and so that's why I'm there.

Maniscalco: And how have you been received on that committee?

Johnson: I'm received well wherever I go.

Maniscalco: Good. That's good to hear.

Johnson: I'm like Cheyenne Bowie. And when we're off camera I'll tell you about Cheyenne Bowie. But no, I just don't dwell on that. I don't expect it and so I don't get it. To answer your question, favorably.

Maniscalco: Well, that's good. What I was really wondering about was more the fact that here you have a committee of political people who lean one way or another, specifically towards Democrats or Republicans, and you're claiming that you're not either of those, and how are you received that way.

Johnson: Once you're there—okay, and I appreciate your pursuing that. Once you're there, the things that you deal with are program issues. We hear a lot of appeals of people who have violated program guidance and so forth, producers. And so we hear those appeals and act on them. There's no politics involved with that, it's program. [Redacted Information]

Maniscalco: Interesting. And I guess to follow up with that, can you explain more about the lawsuit you kind of led into this story with a little more?

Johnson: [Redacted Information] [In the southern and south eastern states, there are greater numbers of black farmers than we have here in the Midwest. They filed a class action suit with the Department of Agriculture. The general import of their suit was about loans and program payments.]

You get newsletters. That's the way the USDA communicates with producers. If you're a registered producer, program participant or something, you get a newsletter. And it has dates and program announcements and the traditional newsletter type information that's in it. And some of those people just didn't get the news. And it has filing deadlines and so forth. And so apparently they met those deadlines and all and their applications got misplaced. They missed deadlines of—yeah we're working on yours. Well, if you're going to put in a spring crop, July is a little too late for you to get approved, you see. And those kinds of things.

And so as a result some people lost their livelihood. If you don't—whether you have your own money or not, if you rely on commercial money, and that's your procedure, then it has to be in a timely manner that you keep functioning. And if that doesn't happen you can't function, see. And so some people, they just lost their livelihood. They lost everything, because they depended on that. If that is your way of making a living, you don't have anything else to fall back on, and so your flow has to continue so you can continue the way you make a living. And so some guys filed a lawsuit.

Well, USDA did the traditional American thing. They came up with a figure. They gave them, I don't remember how much it was, 50,000 dollars or something, I don't remember exactly. But give them this and make it go away. Okay, too late, you're already broke and you're out of business. So I guess it's some remedial effect, I suppose it is, I suppose it is. I understand that there's potential that there's going to be another one. But that's what your class action suit was.

Maniscalco: That's interesting. Now you said it was mostly farmers in the south. And up here there weren't any African American farmers that were involved in that?

Johnson: You could join the class action. You could have. I could have. You couldn't have. Not with the name Maniscalco.

Maniscalco: We could have tried it but I don't think it would have worked. It would have been a good try.

Johnson: I could have. I didn't. It wasn't restricted to some geographic area. It was a black farmer class action. But the preponderance of black farmers obviously are in that area.

Maniscalco: And you mentioned before that black farmers are kind of becoming harder and harder to find, especially in this region. Can you talk a little bit about that and why you think that might be?

Johnson: When I was on the county committee I know that—well, first of all, in oh, a three-mile radius of here when I was growing up practically all these farms were black-owned. I say practically because there were others around. Today my brother and I—now there's a fellow up the road, he and his brother, they own some land, and I guess you have to consider he's a farmer because he has some horses and he bales hay and has his land that he bales hay off of, they ride the stupid horses, and so I guess because he's a landowner and he does that. And I say that because I don't want to diminish their significance. But to what you would consider a farmer, farmland that produces a commercial crop, just my brother and me.

Now when I was on the county committee there were nine black farmers in Madison County. I knew 'em all. Every one of them. And you have to understand that that nine wasn't people who necessarily produced anything. They owned land and somebody farmed their land and so you know if I rent your farm we're both registrants, you understand? And so that nine, out of that nine my brother, another cousin and me were the three farmers. Now there's one other fellow that runs a bunch of cattle, and so I guess you'd have to—a bunch of cattle. Doesn't farm, he doesn't crop farm. But he does have a bunch of cattle. And so you have to include him. You have to include him. We were the biggest ones, and as I said, we've never farmed over 500 acres. So there aren't any. Now down in southern Illinois and in northern Illinois, Kankakee, that area there, there's I guess what you call truck farmers. Vegetable farmers. [Redacted Information]

Maniscalco: Why do you think there are so few? You mentioned even your kids weren't interested in getting into farming and stuff.

Johnson: It's a tough life, Mike. It's a tough life. It's a hard life. And especially when you compare that to the fact that you can go to town and get you a job and you're going to get a check every payday. It's not going to get rained out, a drought doesn't matter, nothing matters. You're going to get paid. And you can establish a lifestyle that is as predictable and sure as anything can be. It's not the case on the farm.

You consider also that you don't have to be very big to have 1 million dollars' worth of investment in equipping yourself. You don't have to be very big to not own enough land to

sustain yourself. Own. It takes a lot of money to farm. A lot of money. And there's a lot of risk. And so if you don't have any capital, you don't have anyone in your family or some other resource who has that capital, then you have to rely on the commercial money market.

I certainly don't want to suggest in this forum that there's anything less than fairness and open consideration in the commercial market. I don't want to suggest that. Ha-ha. But unless you're established—and I don't want to make farming any different from any other industry. Unless you're established in that and unless you have some equity involvement in it—and that's not always cash or tangible, but some equity, knowledge or anything, it's pretty difficult to break into that, you see. You have to have a platform in order to launch expansion, you see. And I think you went through an era—we'll take my family as an example. Take it as an example. My older siblings of necessity had to get out of the nest because there's just not room enough in the nest for everybody, do you see. So whether it was their own choice to go find a more lucrative profession or something. I don't know. But there's only so much room in the nest, you see. And some of it came about as a result of that. Well, after you're out of the nest and you're out there making the money and you wear a clean shirt and a sweater around to make your money, after you're into that, you're not going to come back for less. If you do you're too stupid to succeed anyway. Well, that's the truth. So some of it I think can be understood, it's understandable from that.

And so as no one comes back, which is incidentally something that nonblack farmers are starting to experience, there's not another generation to fall back on. And that's why you see land, land, land, land for sale. Just nobody's back there to do it. Family sizes have gotten smaller and so you don't have any boys who are dumb enough to be there doing it. And you just see a lot of farm ground that's for sale because of that. But I think maybe to answer your question more immediately the opportunity to make a living was more attractive off the farm, and the farm and your ability to grow, expand, wasn't as great as your ability to go to town and make a living.

Maniscalco: That makes it very clear. You just talked about some of the difficulties of farming. What have been some of the pleasures of your farming? Why do you enjoy it?

Johnson: Independence is one thing. I don't know if independence is a motivation for me, but it is a pleasure. I look at my situation. I don't know what your spiritual background and understanding is but I see myself in this much as I see the characters of the Old Testament where things were just—the can was just kicked down the road and someone else had to fulfill it. In prior generations there was always—I look at my family, we're no smarter than anybody else, we're no tougher than anybody else, we are just another family that the Lord decided to bless because of the prayers of my faithful foreparents. I have to face the issue of liquidating this farm one way or another. No other generation's had to do it. Every generation prior to this had a son who stepped up and he was going to do it. I don't have that. And so I really do see my situation as maybe a curse. Maybe a curse, I don't know, I don't know. I'm the end of what the Lord promised our family. I've got to do it. However I do it, however it's done, I've got to do that, because there is no other place to pass the buck.

And so I'm not sure that I can take any credit for why I'm here. I'm not sure I can take any credit for why the farm has meant so much to me. I'm not sure I can take credit for that. I can tell you this. My parents and their era of compatriots were great storytellers. Great storytellers. I come in here now and I sit down, I turn the television on and you don't have to have an

imagination, if you turn it up, it'll just bombard you, you don't even have to think, you can't help absorb it because if you just turn the volume up it has to go right straight through. But I would sit and listen to my parents and their contemporaries, they would come and we'd be sitting there in the kitchen around the stove and going on, and they told great stories. And those people that they told those stories about became real characters for me. It was like I knew them. Not only the people but their animals. They were great storytellers. And the voices and spirits of those people still speak to me out of the soil. It's not a decision I made. What is that thing that you play chess with? Pawns? Isn't that what they call them? I'm just a pawn on this board. I don't move myself. That's the way I see it.

Maniscalco: Thank you. That's very good. We're starting to wrap up and I am curious.

Johnson: You promise?

Maniscalco: I don't know. Just for that I might add another question.

Johnson: I'm starting to get hungry. Go ahead.

Maniscalco: Okay. Well, I'm curious, where do you see farming going? You've made a few comments.

Johnson: In general.

Maniscalco: In general.

Johnson: The industry.

Maniscalco: Yes.

Johnson: I think I see, Mike, and I think you have to see, that our country is no longer the only big hog at the trough. There's other big hogs there too and they get to get some of the feed too. And so I think that you see the focus of production agriculture moving to places other than the United States for the balance of economies and so forth. I think that what you will see here in the United States for a period will be large—large large—farms. There's no reason that three or four guys couldn't farm the entire state of Illinois. There's no need to have all of the thousands of little peanuts that are around farming now. A guy farming a couple thousand acres. Who cares? You're a nuisance. Get out of the way.

In order for the industry to become efficient. You can have better than a quarter of a million dollars tied up in a combine and its attachments and so forth, and it runs at best one month out of twelve. That's a lot of money sitting idle. And the same not just—I used the combine as an example. But all your equipment. Well, that's just not efficient, you see. And every one of us hillbillies has to have his own tractor, his own combine, his own truck, his own dog. He's got to have his own, because that's American. Well, okay, so you're a stupid American. We don't look at the economies, the efficiencies of it, you see. And so in the near run I think that you will see in the next—as I said before, I think the market is going to get rid of a whole bunch of them in the next couple years. And then it always takes a couple years after that for the dust to settle. They're going to go through—they're going to spend some more money trying to go through court actions and all that other stuff. Once you have money in the hole you might as well just keep throwing more after it. Broke is broke. You can't get broker.

And so I think that's what you'll see within the next four, five years. And then you will see the next plateau of farm sizes. There already are multiples of thousands of acres. But you will see bigger multiples of thousands of acres after that. And then I think that you will see marginal

territories like where we are right here. There are no big farms. I've got a friend. He farms probably 1,300, 1,400 acres. He farms less than 2,000 acres. I don't know exactly what the number is but it's less than 2,000 acres. But he probably has thirty-five landowners. Well, that's not efficient either. You just can't make money doing that. You can't make money farming patches. You make money farming big plots because the margins are small. And so you have to do things that influence the margin. You got to produce a lot of little ones in order to have a big one.

And so I think you will see whatever is contributed in this area—and this area, I mean probably within a thirty-mile circumference of right here—that it'll grow houses. My farm here, there's no comparison to what it's worth raising houses than raising corn, you see. And I think that's what I see in the near term. If there's a way to confine what near term is. Near term I think is somewhere—in this reference it's somewhere inside of fifteen years.

And then I think that the next swell wave will be you will start to see a continued migration of farming operations to more economically attractive countries. One of the things that we've done in this country is we've priced ourselves out of the market. Whatever you want to blame for it. We just have. You can look at the—everything is—I failed economics twice, and so I'm an expert on this. I cannot understand how you can ship raw products overseas and have them refined and ship them back and it's economically more beneficial than producing it here. As I said, I failed economics, so I can't understand that, see.

And that's what we've done. Not only with durable goods, but we've done that also in—have you ever had a call from a credit card company or something? Can't understand them. They're certainly not calling from Alton, see. And that's what we've done to ourselves. And there are other competitors that are at the trough that are not as expensive as we are. And it doesn't matter who cuts an apple. Apple is cut. If you want it cut in four pieces, it's cut in four pieces. Whether it's done here or whether it's done somewhere else. It's the same apple, it's cut in pieces. I don't go to grocery stores very often, but if I do, if my luck runs out and I have to go to a grocery store with my wife, I head straight for the vegetables, because they got more—I can't even pronounce the names of them. I have no idea what you use them for. Some of the funniest-looking stuff. I don't know what you do with them, but that's the influence of commercial exchange. Fascinating. I go straight there.

I went to the store for my wife here a couple weeks ago and while I was there I walked through the meat department. And I was looking at the meats there. Do you know that there are steaks, beefsteaks in the store, that are twelve dollars and something a pound? \$12.67 I remember that. And I can't tell you what cut it was. But it was that a pound. Do you know there's nothing you can do to a cow to make it worth \$12.67 a pound? There's nothing you can do, you see.

But somewhere beyond fifteen years—might be sixteen, but I think you'll see more and more land—the people live here and the farming is done somewhere else.

Maniscalco: I have one last question for you, Lloyd. This is kind of the big one. This interview is going to be something that's going to be around for a long time, and it's going to be a historical document. And I've noticed you have a beautiful family and you have all sorts of pictures of grandkids and children all around your home. And what is the one thing you would want them to find in this interview if one day one of them happened to stumble across and say, "Hey, look, there's Grandpa Lloyd, he did an interview in that project," and what's the one comment or thing you would like them to walk away from this interview with?

Johnson: Probably the pride I have in them. Probably that I'm not mad at them, in fact I think I'm probably relieved that I don't have a child that wants to farm. I probably am relieved. Probably whether liquidating the farm means that I sell it or whether it means that I do something else that they retain it and all, if that's the case it won't be because I expect them to farm it. But I would expect them to be responsible stewards of the land, because it's not your asset, it's God's earth, and so if you're not going to be a steward to it you shouldn't have it. Probably if that were the case I would want them to know how fortunate I feel as having the opportunity of being their family head. I really love my kids, I really love my kids. And it is such a blessing to me to see that they're there now and on their own and they're productive. [Redacted Information]

Maniscalco: Well, thank you very much, Lloyd. It was an honor to sit here with you and interview you and it was a lot of fun.

Johnson: Thank you. Nice having you.

Maniscalco: Thank you.