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Oral History of Illinois Agriculture

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Abstract: Don was born in 1918, near the end of WWI, and grew up on a dairy farm in DeKalb County. His family consisted of his parents, a brother, and a sister, with Don being the youngest. His father's farm also raised pigs, chickens, and feed for the animals. After graduating from high school in 1935, Don rented 90 acres from his father and started farming and building up his dairy herd. He married the day he started the farm because he said he "didn't want to spend all day in the field and then come home and cook his dinner." He and his wife have lived on farms ever since. They had three children, two girls and a boy. Don went into debt after purchasing farming machinery and his house burning down, but it was normal to be in debt if you were farming at that time. Most of his farming equipment was purchased used at auctions because new equipment was too expensive. He was very adamant about having new technology such as telephones, televisions, and different household appliances. For recreation he visited with friends, went to "moving picture shows," and played pinochle. He joined the Farm Bureau, the ASCS, and the Pure Milk Associations and was actively involved in the community. When discussing World War II, Don says prices rose and rations affected him somewhat because people could not purchase as much due to rationing of meat, butter, and gasoline. Rural electrification allowed him to more efficiently milk his cows and increase their numbers. As technology improved he began to gradually replace his older appliances with newer and more efficient ones. He is very articulate about his childhood years growing up on a farm, about his being able to resurrect a rather run-down farm by plowing, planting, and fertilizing. Don describes how his day-to-day farming routines and recreational activities changed over time. In 19 6, Don's farm totaled around 450 acres and was operated by his son-in-law. Upon his retirement, Don and his wife began wintering in Florida. They returned in the summer and help with the pigs.

Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum

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Interview with Don (Anonymous)
ISM_92_Don
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Rosemarie: This is Rosemarie Ostberg and I am interviewing Don on November the 3rd, 1986, at his Kingston home. This is an interview on the changing life on the farm basically since World War II. Now, Don, do you mind if we record this interview? Now, first, let me ask you a few question about, sort of way back uh—where were you born?

Don: I was born in Kingston Township; only about three and a half miles from where I now live on Cherry Valley Road. My father was of English decent and my mother of German, so I guess I'm kind of a true American.

Rosemarie: (Laughter) You certainly are. Do you mind telling me when you were born?

Don: I was born in 1918.

Rosemarie: You celebrated the end of the—of World War I?

Don: Well, World War I was still on, see, because I was born in January.

Rosemarie: Oh, it went on until November.

Don: Yes.

Rosemarie: Did you have any brothers and sisters? Not when you were born, but when you were growing up?

Don: I had a brother and a sister and I was the baby of the family.

Rosemarie: Oh, you were the smallest one, alright. Recollect, how many—what kind of a farm your father had at that time.

Don: It was an eighty acre farm, which was rather an average lifestock farm in those days. In other words, it was either eighties and then there was a few farmers that farmed a hundred and sixty, but they were the big farmers.

Rosemarie: What did he raise?

Don: Well, he had dairy and back in those days nearly everyone had dairies and of course we had our chickens and we had pigs and then we raised corn and oats and hay.

Rosemarie: Were the oats for feed or were the—did you sell any of the oats?

Don: Yes, we, in fact, we fed all of the grain we raised on the eighty acres and we always had to buy some feed besides because we had—well we milked around sixteen cows, which was quite a few cows at that time because they were milked by hand.

Rosemarie: Approximately, how many pigs did you have?

Don: I think he'd raised somewhere between eighty and ninety pigs a year.

Rosemarie: Were your brother and sister near you in age or were you pretty far separated?

Don: No, my sister was only two years older than I was and then my brother was seven years older.

Rosemarie: So this farm, with eighty acres, supported this family of five?

Don: Yes. We lived very well off of it.

Rosemarie: Did you butcher the hogs or did you take them to a place to be butchered or—?

Don: Well we butchered our own hog and of course, we always had to wait till the weather gets cold because we had no refrigeration and the winter, in Northern Illinois, was our refrigeration.

Rosemarie: I'm kind of interested in what kind of farm machinery you had in those days. Let's just take, like, all through grammar school sort of thing or beginning of high school. What type of farm equipment did you have at that time?

Don: Well, one of things I can remember about my childhood is that I used to follow my father, when I was about four years old, when he plowed in the field. He has a single fourteen inch riding plow pulled by three horses and I used to follow the plow and then right behind me was the dog, Pup, we called him. So, we made quite a site going through.

Rosemarie: That's wonderful. So, Dad, he used horses then basically. Did you have a car?

Don: Yes, they bought their first car in 1916. They weren't the first to get automobiles, but that was their car—first car. It was in sixteen, so they had that two years before I was born.

Rosemarie: My goodness. They got a car pretty early, didn't they? And they may not have been the first, but they were one of the first, anyway.

Don: That was a Dodge, so, I'm sure Ford was out before that.

Rosemarie: (Laughter) That's true. Now, did—after that, did—did your Dad buy, let's say, as you went on up to grammar school, did he buy a pickup truck or anything like that? Did he have anything like that?

Don: Yes, we had a truck when I was still in grammar school because we hauled our milk to the plant where we sold our milk. It was a Bowman plant and that was about three miles away and we hauled that in the truck while the weather was good or when the roads were good and then in the winter uh, sometimes we'd have to use the sled to haul the milk, and in the summer, sometimes a wagon because the roads would get impassable for the truck.

Rosemarie: How many horses did you have?

Don: I think we'd keep about four horses most of the time.

Rosemarie: So basically you had horses and cows and hogs and uh—chickens.

Don: Yes.

Rosemarie: Plus Pup. Mustn't forget Pup. (Laughter). So, that was the kind of lifestyle. Can you tell me, let's say, when you were maybe, ten, eleven years old, what a typical day for your father might be?

Don: They always arose early. I think somewhere around five o'clock and they—my mother would always go out and help milk also. And they'd milk the cows and then they'd come in and have a good farm breakfast and then they would go out and finish doing the chores and then go to the field possibly about eight o'clock they'd go to the field then.

Rosemarie: Who would go out?

Don: Well, just my Dad. My mother never helped in the fields.

Rosemarie: Did your father ever have any hired help?

Don: No, but they exchanged help. During threshing time and then filling silo they always changed help with the neighbors, sometimes twelve to fifteen neighbors, be in what they called the threshing gang and then the gang to fill the silos.

Rosemarie: And your mother had to cook for the threshing gang?

Don: Yes.

Rosemarie: So then, they worked the field till about what time, did they come in for noon?

Don: Well, they'd come in around twelve o'clock, at noon, and they always took off an hour because they thought that the horses needed an hour of rest to eat and an hour of rest and then they'd go back out in the fields again.

Rosemarie: Well, on a, let's say, non-threshing day, your father would come in for lunch, wouldn't he? Normally speaking?

Don: Yes.

Rosemarie: And then he'd go back out into the field again and work and then, what time, approximately, would he come in in the evening?

Don: Well, probably around five, well, I guess maybe, maybe closer to four o'clock. Four to four-thirty they'd come in because they had to do the milking at night and we were never exceptionally late. We got done about six-thirty at night and would come in and have our dinner, but we called it supper.

Rosemarie: Of course. Now, as far as you were concerned, going to school at that time, I'm presuming?

Don: Yes.

Rosemarie: Okay, so what would be a typical day for you?

Don: Well I—I think probably as soon as we got about old enough for school or a year after that, on a farm, a farm boy always had some calves to feed and maybe helped with the chickens. My mother—I would help my mother with the chickens and then I would get

ready and go to school and we actually lived around the road, it was two and a half miles, but we did cut across the field which cut it down to just a little over half a mile. Of course, we kind of had to watch out for the livestock in the field because some of it was pasture.

Rosemarie: Um-hm. They might be chasin' you. (Laughter)

Don: Yes.

Rosemarie: So you walked to school, and approximately what time do you think school started?

Don: We started at nine o'clock.

Rosemarie: And then you ate your lunch in school?

Don: Yes. We carried our lunch, see?

Rosemarie: And what time did you get out in the afternoon?

Don: I think we got out about three thirty, and so we'd be back home again about four o'clock

Rosemarie: And then there's more chores to do?

Don: Yes. And then I had to help with the chores at night.

Rosemarie: Did you help your father milk?

Don: Well, I start—I didn't start to milk, probably until I was twelve or thirteen, I think, when I started because my brother was there and my mother was there and so they really didn't need me that badly.

Rosemarie: If you had been the oldest child however, you probably would have started earlier.

Don: That's right.

Rosemarie: Very likely your brother started earlier. Now, why don't you just tell me what a good farm breakfast would have been in those days.

Don: Well, a good farm breakfast in those days almost always had fried potatoes and they would be potatoes fixed after the boiling. The ones left from lunch or dinner, you see, and then we would have our eggs and either bacon or side pork because they would also

have side pork and, of course, we always had our milk because we had our dairy and I think and, of course, we had toast or bread, bread or toast and butter.

Rosemarie: What kind of stove or kitchen appliances did your mother have?

Don: She had a—what they called—a wood burning stove and it was a, you know, a little bit harder to regulate the heat out of.

Rosemarie: (Laughter) What did she do in the summer time to keep butter cool and eggs cool and—?

Don: Well, we had a basement that was fairly cool and so that was our best method of refrigeration—was our basement. Now, that's why—and then, of course, in the summer, see the canned pork and beef and we would eat canned pork and beef; rather than fresh pork and beef because we had no way of keeping it.

Rosemarie: Right. A lot more stuff was canned because it would stay if it was canned properly.

Don: Yes.

Rosemarie: So your mother must have spent a lot of time canning. (Laughter)

Don: Yes.

Rosemarie: Now, one more question and then we'll move along. Uh, what kind of recreation would you say the family had? Not necessarily as a family, but just what did you do as a child for recreation at grammar school, for example?

Don: Well, of course, when I was in school we played with the children at school and then I had some close friends that occasionally in the summer we'd go back and forth and play with those, even though they were half a mile away, we would go over and take turns and they would come over and play with us and, of course, we played ball, much like the children do today.

Rosemarie: What about visiting? I mean—what about holidays as a child? Did your families—did you have other relatives in the area?

Don: Yes, we had relatives in the area, and often times, back then with the cars, you know, weren't too fast, and of course the roads weren't too good. So this was kind of a—a special Sunday that we would go visiting because we would usually go for dinner. I had an

Uncle that lived about twenty-five miles away, which we thought that was a long trip in those days.

Rosemarie: It was a long trip. It took a long while to get there.

Don: Yes. And then uh—we also had some Aunts, I had some Aunts on my mother's side. Well, shorter distance than that away.

Rosemarie: Did you ever do any visiting during the winter time when the roads were not very good, like, this is the twenties, you know—in the twenties?

Don: No, I think we was kind of careful not to do too much planning in the winter because if the roads got bad we'd have to cancel and we—

Rosemarie: Yes. So, then your Christmas was just a Christmas with your family? Or did you—

Don: —Yes. That's about right. I can't ever remember having any company at Christmas. I think just the five of us had our Christmas together.

Rosemarie: What would be a typical present that you might get for Christmas when you were ten or eleven, twelve years old?

Don: Well, of course, if we—I can remember my biggest present, I think was a bicycle, but usually you got a ball bat or a ball or a whatever, you know, a boy kind of wanted to play with. We had toys of course so—we had little toy trucks and tractors and like that, too.

Rosemarie: Things like that, too?

Don: Yeah.

Rosemarie: But the visiting was generally in the fall or in the after threshing, it'd have to be, or in the late spring when it wasn't too muddy and the summer, I gather, then.

Don: Yeah.

(next segment)

Rosemarie: Alright, then let's move along down a bit. What happened when you went to high school? Did you go to high school? Did you go to high school in this area?

Don: Yes. I went to the high school that was about six miles from me, so, I had to drive a car, in fact, we traded off with a neighbor that drove and some days we didn't drive all the way, we would have to leave the car two and a half miles from home and walk the rest of the way because we had the gravel roads and they would break up in the spring of the year. Other than that, and then of course, some days in the winter and actually I can remember in high school staying down with some of my classmates because we couldn't get back and forth with the blizzards and the snow that we had.

Rosemarie: But you were basically prepared for this kind of thing. This wasn't unusual?

Don: Yes. It wasn't unusual, no.

Rosemarie: But wasn't it rather hard because you couldn't notify your parents, I mean.

Don: Well, we had telephones.

Rosemarie: Oh, you did have telephones.

Don: Yeah, we had the ole' family line telephone or the party line telephone, I guess they call it.

Rosemarie: So you could call your father and tell him where you were so they wouldn't worry.

Don: Yes. Yeah. Um-hm.

Rosemarie: Well, when did you graduate from high school?

Don: 1935.

Rosemarie: Now, which high school did you go to—Kingston?

Don: Kingston.

Rosemarie: Kingston High School. Well, what did you do after you graduated from high school?

Don: Well, I worked at home for two years and then—

Rosemarie: —with your dad?

Don: With my Dad, yeah. And then he had purchased a farm in thirty-three, which is right in the depression, and that one was for my brother and then another farm came for sale right—joining that and so he purchased that and I kind talked him in to allowing me to farm at kind of a tender age. So, I started on my own pretty young.

Rosemarie: You certainly did! Goodness gracious! If you graduated from high school at eighteen—that's about twenty, twenty-one. That's very, very, very early. Now, how big was your brother's? He was seven years, you said, older than you? Was he married at that time?

Don: He wasn't married when he started farming, but then got married soon after.

Rosemarie: So, how many acres did he have?

Don: I think it was approximately a hundred and twenty when he started to farm.

Rosemarie: Which was bigger than the home farm?

Don: Yes.

Rosemarie: That's interesting. Did he have dairy—a lot of dairy cows, too or did he—?

Don: —Yes, he had—he had a dairy and, of course, this is some of what I did the two years I was out of high school. I kind of helped him a little bit too, and he kind of let me go over and help my brother, see. I run the tractor—we had a tractor at that time and I would go over when we put in the crop and run the tractor.

Rosemarie: How big was your farm when you started the farm?

Don: I think the first year we farmed we had about ninety acres, is all. Here, on this one.

Rosemarie: And did your brother help you on your farm a little bit? Your father a little bit or—?

Don: Well, uh, yes, my father come over and help me plant the corn because I've never planted corn (unintelligible). And so he helped me plant the corn, I can remember that, but other than that we farmed— my brother had all the work he could handle so he couldn't help much, see, so I was kind of on my own.

Rosemarie: That's a lot of acreage for a young man like that. But you lived at home. Did your brother live—now when he first started with that acreage that you're talking about, the one hundred twenty acres, did he live on that or did he live at home?

Don: He lived on the acreage that he run. There was some other people lived in the house and so he stayed with them.

Rosemarie: I see. Did he rent the house out or did they ask to keep it?

Don: Well, I don't—I really don't know what kind of arrangement they had, but it was some kind of an arrangement.

Rosemarie: Maybe they had the use of the house on that particular property.

Don: Probably.

Rosemarie: Now, did you have livestock on your farm?

Don: Oh, yes, I had—all of the farms in this area were livestock farms. I started out with about nine cows and, of course, we milked those by hand or I milked those by hand 'cause my wife didn't milk. She was a city girl.

Rosemarie: When did you get married? I should ask you that.

Don: We got married the day I started the farm because I had enough to do with the livestock. I didn't want to have to get my own meals.

Rosemarie: I see. So you got married very young also then also. Alright, so where did you live? Did you live—was there a house on your acreage?

Don: Yes, there was a real old house here and, in fact, they said that the timber was hauled in with oxen when they brought it in and we had, I suppose it was an old chimney, too, because the first year we were married, in that fall, we lost our house with fire. I went to a dairy sale to try to pick up more cows and we took the wife over to stay with my mother while we were gone and when we come home we didn't have a house.

Rosemarie: Oh my goodness! Burned down and in the first year, too! My goodness! You haven't been married very long either.

Don: No.

Rosemarie: Lost all the wedding presents and everything, I guess.

Don: No, they saved nearly all—the neighbors saved nearly all of it, but they just couldn't get the fire out at that time.

Rosemarie: But they saved a lot of the—

Don: They—well a lot of our furnishing was saved.

Rosemarie: Oh, that's wonderful! And that's when neighbors had to come from quite a ways—distance to do this. Must have been rather a disappointment coming home and seeing no house.

Don: Well, with winter, seein' it burnin' in November, and with winter coming on it wasn't the happiest sight to know that you had livestock to take care of and no house on the farm.

Rosemarie: Uh, did—you had a barn then, at that point?

Don: Yes. Oh, yes!

Rosemarie: How many other [?] buildings did you have on it?

Don: Well, we had a—there was a hog house, a barn, and a chicken house, a machine shed and there was a full, kind of a full set up, of farm buildings.

Rosemarie: What kind of equipment—did you have any equipment of your own?

Don: Oh, yes. I went in debt, of course. My father backed me though, so I had a reasonable banker and—but I had a small tractor that would only pull two twelve inch plows and—but it came with a two row cultivator and I had a disc and—but I did use—or my dad come over and planted corn the first year, I can't remember.

Rosemarie: So he had a corn planter?

Don: Yes, he had a corn planter so I didn't have to buy that and then we changed the—I guess I bought an old seeder and I bought a lot of my equipment used, see, because I was on a very limited capital.

Rosemarie: Did you buy it from other farmers or did you buy it at auctions?

Don: At auctions mostly. Yeah, um-hm and then uh, as you know, the time went on I would pick up a little more machinery all the time, just like I increased my dairy.

Rosemarie: Did you have hogs, too?

Don: Yes, I had hogs. I bought—it was kind of a peculiar situation because, see this, I started in thirty-seven, and there was the drought in thirty-six, so feed was very expensive, in fact, corn was around a dollar twenty a bushel, I think, which that was expensive corn because, you see, right now corn is only about a dollar thirty cents at this time.

Rosemarie: And that was a long time ago, in the depression times.

Don: Yes, but see that was just four years away from thirty-three and thirty-seven, when I started. So it was high, but no one thought there was any money in feeding hogs, but I had nothing to lose so I brought over fifty of the hogs from home, my dad was actually anxious to get rid of them, he said they were money losers, but come along—

Rosemarie: —He didn't have any left, or he was just getting rid of that many?

Don: Well, I think we had about ninety all together. I brought about fifty, maybe I had a few more than that, but I brought over about fifty and uh—but when everyone else thought they would be money losers and so then when I come to selling them in September I found they bought a very good price.

Rosemarie: Oh, so you made some money off of them? (Laughter) Now, you— did you have to buy a lot of feed or did you—?

Don: —Well, I had to buy all of the feed, see, when I started. We started in—I started in May and that's why I waited till May because I didn't—grass was on for the cattle and I didn't have to buy quite as much.

Rosemarie: For the cattle, so then you, yeah, buy it for the hogs?

Don: Yeah.

Rosemarie: So yeah, now, you brought those hogs over, not when you began farming, but a little bit after that or—?

Don: Well, right when we began farming.

Rosemarie: Oh, you brought those hogs over? I see. What did you do about the—where did you live when your house burned down?

Don: Well, we stayed in uh—with uh—stayed with my wife's folks in Kingston and I drove back and forth and then half the time and then the other half we stayed over with my parents. It was both about three miles away. So, we kind of divided it up and I think they started to build the house, well, I believe it burnt the thirtieth of November and we had a house build by February. So, it actually went pretty well.

Rosemarie: How did they build it in the middle of winter? That's really—that's uh— (chuckle)

Don: Well, it was fortunate there was a mild spell the first of September and we had used a carpenter crew a lot on my brother's farm that had about five real good carpenters and they came in here and as I say we, moved in in February.

Rosemarie: Now, it burned when, did you say?

Don: I think it was the thirtieth of November.

Rosemarie: And they had a mild spell after that?

Don: Yes.

Rosemarie: And they had some time and you moved in there?

Don: Yes.

Rosemarie: My goodness. But it must have been rather expensive. You were already in debt for all this equipment.

Don: Well, I didn't own the farm, see? I rented the farm from my father, so that was it. It was quite a lost to him because the house was so old we didn't have much insurance on it.

Rosemarie: I see. Yes, of course not. And so then you built—then you built the—you had to borrow money to build this house, too, I would think.

Don: Well, I really don't know. That was my father's business, see, he put up the new house, too.

Rosemarie: Oh, he put up the new house, too?

Don: Right.

Rosemarie: I see. Alright, so then you went along into—and your brother's farm was doing alright then, basically and so forth?

Don: Um-hm.

Rosemarie: Alright, let's talk about this time for a few minutes the—let's talk about a few other things. Now any other equipment that you had—how did you harvest the crops? With what kind of equipment did you use?

Don: Well, it was a—we had a corn binder that, you know, put the corn in a bundle and then we picked that up on a hayrack and this was real hard work and we had to then throw it into the silo filler and this filling silo was just a real hard labor. Now, the oats, we had a binder that cut em', and tied them into a bundle, then we shocked the oats and then we had the threshing run, that we picked up the bundles on a rack and then we put them into the threshing machine.

Rosemarie: But loading the silo was very, very difficult?

Don: That was—that was hard work.

Rosemarie: So then basically your corn and oats were used as feed for the cattle and the hogs?

Don: Yeah, well then, we had some corn left standing in the field because it only took about, oh, fifteen to twenty acres, I think, for the silage and we would pick this by hand, at least I did for the first few years because I didn't have a corn picker. Corn pickers were out but there were very (unintelligible) at that time.

Rosemarie: But you picked that—basically you saved it for you animals?

Ron: We had a little bit to sell, but not too much.

(end of segment two)

Rosemarie: I see. Okay, that sounds—that sounds very interesting. At that time, tell me, when you had the new house (laughter), what type of appliances did your wife have in the kitchen?

Don: We still had the wood burning stove. You had to remember there was no electricity, at that time; not in this area. Electricity came through in some parts of the rural areas about—my dad got it in 1937, but we didn't get electricity, right here, until forty-one.

Rosemarie: Um-hm.

Don: And so we still had the old wood burning cook stove to burn on. They'd taken that out of the old house. We saved it and we had a washing machine that was gasoline motor driven, you know, and I think we had a treadle sewing machine, I believe my wife had one.

Rosemarie: And you had a telephone?

Don: And we had a telephone.

Rosemarie: Party-line probably.

Don: Yes, party-line.

Rosemarie: Rural electrification, was that what brought electricity to you? How was it when your father was that far away, that he got it in thirty-seven and you didn't get it till four years later?

Don: I don't know why. I guess they went by with a line that went into Herbert—is why he got it that early. In other words, they electrified the small towns first and Herbert, evidently, didn't have any electricity at that time and then they got it I think, and I think that's why he got it that much earlier.

Rosemarie: Yeah, because (unintelligible). Now, in other words, we're into World War II before you got electricity.

Don: Well, we had it just before that. You know, in other words, World War II started in the latter part of December 7th, 1941. So we did get it, I think it was in the early spring of forty.

Rosemarie: Your childhood, did you have a radio? When you—

Don: —uh, We, um—Yes, I can remember, I guess my Dad was quite progressive because he got a radio back in 1924 and I know they, you know, that was quite a thing to get radio and, you know, radio was different than it is now. They had nights when Chicago would be silent. They had silent nights and then I remember you could—we could pull in real well with Pittsburg, Pensylvania and our first radio had earphones on it, but it did have a speaker also. It was a

Crosley and I got—we got that when I was six years old, but I can remember it very well. We sit around the radio and listen, but when you put the headphones on it was battery operated so you could turn off one tube and that would save some—some of your battery. It didn't take as much battery to operate three tubes as it did four. Ours had a four-tube radio (unintelligible).

Rosemarie: So that if you—if one person was listening with the earphones then it didn't use as much of the battery.

Don: That's right. Yeah.

Rosemarie: You had kerosene lamps, too?

Don: Yes. Yes and even when I started the farm we had kerosene lamps and my wife; she came from Kingston, and of course they had had modern plumbing and electric lights. So that is quite a change.

Rosemarie: Yes, and so she had to come to a farm with wood burning stove and kerosene lanterns and probably a privy outside. And that was, I'm sure, a change for her.

Don: Yes.

Rosemarie: Did you have friends that came over and visited you and did you visit other people? Well, what type of a thing did you do for recreation?

Don: Well, we had young people our age that were also married; this was when we were married. They came and we used to play cards on, like, one night a week. That was seen to be our main recreation and then, that is in group recreation, but we also attended quite a few moving picture shows. This was before television, see—before we had television, anyway. And so this was really our method of entertainment and it—well I'm talking about the middle forties, then, maybe—but anyway when we had small children they used to have cry rooms in the theatres so you could take them.

Rosemarie: Oh, that's interesting! (Laughter) I didn't know that. Now, so you went, did you go to the theatre, the picture theatre in Kingston? At this point?

Don: No, it was in Genoa, which was the closest one we had, which was a little further away it was about six miles away, but it was close. There was a lot of kinda small theatres in those days because they were, and they were successful, they usually have a real good

picture on Sunday and Monday nights and then, I think, on Saturday nights, I know when the boy got a little older he loved to go because they had the Westerns on Saturday night.

Rosemarie: But you and your wife played cards some nights and some nights you went to the movies and this was the basic type of entertainment. What type of cards did you play? What—

Ron: —Uh, Pinochle I believe it was.

Rosemarie: Pinochle, I see. And friends came over and did that. Did they ever have any dances?

Ron: We never attended dancing. So, we never learned to dance so—

Rosemarie: (unintelligible)—then you didn't attend many dances. Did you at that time—did your father, let's start out with that, belong to the Farm Bureau or any Farm Organizations?

Don: Well, I know he did in his latter years of farming; he belonged to Farm Bureau.

Rosemarie: But not necessarily when you were growing up?

Don: Not when we were growing up, I don't think. No.

Rosemarie: And when you first started farming, obviously you didn't when you first started out.

Don: We—I don't think—I think it was three or four years after, but I can't remember the exact date when we joined Farm Bureau, but I— three or four years after we started farming.

Rosemarie: And your brother joined also?

Don: Yes. I think so.

Rosemarie: When the war came along, you might tell me what effect this had on your farm and your brother's farm and…

Don: Yeah, well, I was twenty-three years old when the war started. So, I would have been drafted, had I not possibly had dependence, but probably I wasn't drafted because I had a agricultural deferment.

Rosemarie: Um-hm.

Don: And they had a point system. I don't know, maybe you remember this, but anyway I know—I think I had perhaps, see all of my—a lot of my friends, I should say, not all of them, but a lot of my friends went to the service and I think I felt a little guilty that I didn't go and yet I'm sure I was more valuable at what I was doing and—because when they figured up the points system, and my wife was helping me, of course, but we had enough points to keep myself out and three other men.

Rosemarie: (Chuckle) Because you were doing things that were valuable. Now those people that signed up: did they have farms of their own, like you did? Were they running a farm of their very own or just helping their father or—?

Don: Well, most of 'em were actually single men that I was aware of.

Rosemarie: Um-hm.

Don: And, of course, the war got close to home real quick. I had a cousin that was on the *Arizona*.

Rosemarie: Oh, I see.

Don: And so I don't know whether he ever knew they ever declared war or not.

Rosemarie: No, that's very likely true. Well, yes you did have many, many points. Now, what did this do in terms of farm prices or—?

Don: Well, farm prices started to pick up actually as early as thirty-seven and thirty-eight and they just picked up gradually, but there were ceilings on a lot of prices and actually they held inflation under control very well during the war years, and of course, many of the things were rationed, you know, and so this held, like there was meat stamps, you know, to buy meat and butter stamps, so it actually held the demand down a lot because people just didn't have the stamps to buy them.

Rosemarie: Right. Your right.

Don: Of course, gasoline, this affected us greatly because we were very restricted on how much we could drive in the country, see, because we didn't have, you had also gasoline stamps, see, would buy so much gasoline.

Rosemarie: Right. Didn't farmers get an extra allotment more than—?

Don: —Well, we got enough to run our tractors and I can't just recall how that was, but it was kind of figured out on a per acre basis and so really we didn't get enough, we had plenty to farm with, but we— then I think they took speedometer readings too and so we didn't get any pleasure driving.

Rosemarie: No, I'm sure of that. How did it, certainly butter rationing, did that affect you?

Don: It didn't because I think it took the same stamps to buy butter and meat, if I remember correctly, and so we butchered our meat and that way we had enough to buy butter.

Rosemarie: So you butchered your own meat that you had?

Don: Yes. That is, some of our own meat, you know.

Rosemarie: Right. Well, but that left you—what about sugar ration? That, of course, you didn't raise your sugar so—

Don: —No. I think they did allow us a little extra sugar for canning because we did—we did can.

Rosemarie: I was gonna say, with the amount of canning you do.

Don: Yeah, and so I guess we kinda doubled it out too, ya know. In other words, I can remember I was drinking coffee with sugar in it. I found that I liked it just as well without sugar in it.

(end of segment three)

Rosemarie: Tell me when you did get the electricity to your place. Did some appliances, in time, follow that? In other words, did you get some electrical appliances?

Don: Oh, yes. Yeah, we had purchased a milking machine, I think, with a gasoline motor, about two years prior to us getting electricity.

Rosemarie: Oh, so you did have a milking machine a couple years earlier than that.

Don: Yes, uh-huh. Yeah and, of course, that when we merely put an electric motor on and it was the same thing with our washing machine in the house. We merely changed the gas—took the gasoline engine off and put in an electric motor on and we had a

electric powered washing machine then. And of course we—then we got our first electric iron and a refrigerator. Which, you know, kinda lifted our standard of living because before that we did have a little old, you might say, refrigeration, because when I shipped milk the milkman would bring us back a chunk of ice and we had an old icebox in the basement, and you could get a big chunk of ice for ten cents in those days and so that—that helped keep our butter and eggs and milk fresh.

Rosemarie: Oh, I should think so, yeah. So when he came to pick up the milk—

Don: —Well, when he brought the cans back. See?

Rosemarie: Oh, when he brought the can, you carried the milk to him and then they brought the cans back.

Don: No. They, on this farm that I lived on here, he picked up the milk in the morning. Then he'd go up there, and this is where they had the ice, at the milk plant, see? I don't know just exactly where they got their ice from, but you know they had the ice storage places.

Rosemarie: Yes. Icehouses, we used to call them.

Don: Yeah and then they would saw off a chunk of ice that would fill my—and I think this ice would last like for two or three days and for ten cents.

Rosemarie: Um-hm. So when he brought the cans back he would—

Don: —Yeah, he'd bring the ice and then I'd try to be around to carry it right up in the house.

Rosemarie: How did you sterilize the cans then?

Don: Well, they did the sterilizing at the plant. We have always shipped grade A milk, and so they would sterilize the plant [milk] up at the Bowman's plants, see? And they actually run through a sterilizing steam pressure, is how they sterilize it.

Rosemarie: Um-hm. And so then they bring you the cans. Now, you'd milked into a buckets and—and then?

Don: Yes and we'd strain it into the can and we had to cool it by water, was the only means we had to cool it, and I can't remember what year, but then soon after we had electricity we purchased what they

called a can cooler and then we could slide—this mine would hold eight cans of milk and we would slide this milk into the cooler and it worked, well, much like a refrigerator, it had coils and everything in it, see, and we would cool our milk that way and we could produce a better quality milk because we could cool it better.

Rosemarie: That's interesting. So, little by little, you were buying more equipment and more modern equipment—

Don: —Yes.

Rosemarie —with the electricity you had. Then when they brought the electricity, did you have to pay for, you know, like, an outdoor light or anything like that? Like, you wanted electricity in your barn to run the milking machine. Did you have to pay, can you remember?

Don: Well, the thing that I can remember is that we had a four dollar minimum, in other words, no matter how little electricity you used your bill was four dollars and the only time, for the first few years that we were run over four dollars, and this will give you an idea as to what they were charging for electricity, was the time when we would brood chickens, we raised chickens, and the brooder was an electric brooder. And then we would sometimes get a little bit over the four dollars, but we would try to hold it down to four dollars.

Rosemarie: So you were turning off lights and not using the appliances too much.

(Laughter)

Don: Right.

Rosemarie: So, alright. At this time you mentioned children and I really should pursue that. How soon after you—I mean—did you—you had children. How many children did you have?

Don: We had three all together. And two girls and a boy and the boy was in the center and uh—

Rosemarie: —So this was during the early years of your marriage?

Don: Yes, um-hm.

Rosemarie: When you were just starting out, so far. And you did, still at that time, go to motion pictures when they were growing up and take the children along and did you take them to the seats with you and then if they cried did you take them to the crying room?

Don: That's right.

Rosemarie: Ah, that was the idea, so they wouldn't disturb other people. Can you, do you remember what the price was to go to the movies in those days?

Don: Well, they would always have bargain nights, too, but the price that I can remember for the good pictures, on Sunday evenings, was thirty-five cents and so it would cost seventy cents for my wife and I, and I don't think they charged for the children—

Rosemarie: —The children?

Don: No.

Rosemarie: Did they have those famous dish nights, when they used to give away dishes Saturday night?

Don: Yes, I think they did in some theatres. Then they used to have a—they were very popular, some of the nights the pictures were never as good, but they had what they called a money night and they'd draw, you know, and then sometimes someone won, you know, quite a little money, twenty-five or fifty dollars or something like that, see.

(Laughter)

Rosemarie: Yes, kind of a lottery, not really bingo, but kind of a lottery. Now, did you have a radio at this time then?

Don: We, of course, as soon as the power went through. I don't believe we had a radio when we had to have battery operated radios. Not when we farmed—when I farmed.

Rosemarie: Your father had one, but you didn't have one.

Don: Yes, we didn't have one 'cause I wasn't that well off, see.

Rosemarie: No.

Don: But then when the electricity went through we had a radio in the house and we even had a radio in the barn so we could hear the—

Rosemarie: —Yeah, I was going to say that somebody mentioned that they had a radio in the barn and I hadn't really thought of that, but of course when you're out their milking why shouldn't you have—

Don: —Yeah, we'd get the markets and the news and actually it was even a benefit for the cows because they would hear strange voices and then they were as never as much alarmed as if—when stranger would come in the barn. In other words, they got used to other voices. Otherwise, it used to be, before we had a radio in the barn they were just real skittish when a stranger would come in with a different voice and talk and so—

Rosemarie: —Hmm. Well, of course, they've proved since then that music, for example, if you had music on, the cows are very fond of music.

(Laughter)

Rosemarie: I think that's very interesting. Did you do much reading? Did you have enough—any time to do reading when you didn't have a radio?

Don: Well, we always had the farm magazines, *Farm Journal*, *Prairie Farmer, Successful Farming*. I guess I liked to read and see, agriculture was changing lots, so I had to read to keep up and you know, a college education is very important to everybody, but our extension service was more valuable to a farmer because it kept us up on things than college because had you graduated from college say, if I'da went, I would have graduated in thirty-nine, if I took a four year course. By forty-eight or fifty, everything I learned in college would have been obsolete as far as agriculture is concerned.

Rosemarie: That's true. That's quite true. So, now you—did the extension have courses or did they have workshops or seminars or anything like that that you could go to and learn something about farming matters.

Don: Yes, they had their field days, you know, where you saw actually experiments in the field, but then there was a lot of programs that they would have at night and they had programs over the radios, too. So, they—extension has done a wonderful job, especially in DeKalb County, I think.

Rosemarie: So when you became a member of the Farm Bureau did you go to any of their activities or did they have any to do?

Don: Oh yes, we—in fact I was a director in Farm Bureau for thirty-two years. So I happen to be a director at a very tender age I guess it was because I think it was fifty, fifty-one or fifty-two, that I became a director in Farm Bureau and so, and of course Farm Bureau has been the supporter of extension, and so this is why maybe, you know, was very interested in the fact that they did support extension is what I'm saying. I thought it was a very good organization to belong to. Of course, we carried our automobile insurance with 'em and different things like this with the services they would provide, we bought our fuel and—this I'm talking about the farm fuel, you know, gasoline.

Rosemarie: You could buy the farm fuel through them?

Don: Through them. Yes.

Rosemarie: Oh, you could? I see. Perhaps it would be cheaper.

Don: Yes. They kept the price competitive, in other words, when you—everyone and our fertilizers even came through Farm Bureau, see. And not that we could buy it, but they held the other price down, the competitors, see.

Rosemarie: Sure. That's a question I forgot to ask and I should've asked. What about fertilizing on your father's farm when you were growing up? Was there any fertilizer?

Don: No, not except the livestock fertilizer, I think was the only thing we used because I can remember quite clearly that when I came over here I started to then—they started to use fertilizer I think, at approximately thirty-three. Right at the bottom of depression [The Great Depression] and I know when my brother bought a corn planter. He bought one with a fertilizer attachment on it to put starter fertilizer in it. And then I rented a farm, a real kind of run down farm, in forty-four and I applied super phosphate to it, on the oats. That was one of the first times that they usually would fertilize corn, but they wouldn't fertilize oats and of course we were in the threshing ring and people were so surprised I had next to my own farm that was the best oats on that old farm.

Rosemarie: Hmm, because you put down the—

Don: —super phosphate. That was the only reason, see, but it showed the need for it so badly, see. I rented the farm for four dollars an acre, so you see.

Rosemarie: Yes.

Don: I rented it with the understanding they wanted more rent and I said, "Well, why don't you let me put two dollars an acre on it," for it was about a hundred acre farm. I said, "I wanna spend about two hundred dollars to fertilize, so you and I, you'll have a better farm and I'll make a little more money." And it certainly paid off.

Rosemarie: (Chuckle) So, basically before that time you had the fertilizer from the livestock and that was it?

Don: That was it.

Rosemarie: And then you started fertilizing then. When you started farming did you start fertilizing your farm?

Don: Oh, yes. Not the first year or two, we didn't.

Rosemarie: Because of the expense. Was that it?

Don: Well, it just wasn't a established practice, see. In fact, the first year when I started farming we didn't have a hybrid corn even, see.

Rosemarie: Ah, that was another question I was going to ask. When did hybrid corn—when did you start?

Don: I don't know exactly the first year that hybrid corn come in, but I think we planted our first—it was probably in thirty-eight or thirty-nine. Of course, once we found out what hybrid corn would yield, we quit picking our own seed corn.

Rosemarie: Was it more expensive than the other corn?

Don: Oh yes, it was what we called a tremendous price, I think it was like fourteen dollars a bushel or something and that was a terrible price for corn, you know, to pay for corn, see.

Rosemarie: Yeah. Well, that was a lot. Yes, indeed. But in any event you did start hybrid corn about that time?

Don: Yes.

(end of segment 4)

Rosemarie: Along with the talk of fertilizer, I'd like to ask a question about pesticides. Was that—remember when you started using that or did use that? Let's try that.

Don: We didn't use pesticides until, I believe, the seventies, when we started using pesticides—they were something to come much later.

Rosemarie: Much later? Alright, then we'll go back to where we were—

Don: —The herbicides too, that's the weed killer. For a long while we used a check wire on the corn and we cultivated the corn, not only lengthwise, but cross ways because this was to keep the weeds out, see. That was the way you had to keep the weeds out and I don't believe that herbicides actually came in until somewhere in the sixties someplace.

Rosemarie: Alright. Then we'll go back to the forties and we're moving on into the fifties then, when your children are growing up a little bit and you're operating your farm and [unintelligible]. So you started using hybrid corn then about thirty-seven, thirty-eight and then you continued to use it after that point because of the yield.

Don: Yes. Yeah.

Rosemarie: Now, you said that in forty-four you rented another farm.

Don: Yes.

Rosemarie: To add to what you had already?

Don: Yeah, um-hm. That brought me up to about two-hundred acres of land.

Rosemarie: Um-hm. Now, the people who owned it didn't want to run it or—?

Don: Well, they were Chicago people. They had inherited the farm and he had never farmed he had just rented it out and during the time of the depression. This is why is got in such a run-down state, see, but no one wanted to put anything onto the farm and sometimes they said they wondered whether they should even farm it and whether it was worth farming and there was some farmland, during the depression that wasn't farmed, in this area, because it wouldn't produce enough to pay.

Rosemarie: Now, still were you using the produce of this farm to feed the animals or were you selling some at the time?

Don: Well, we kept enlarging our livestock, of course, and we had heifers around here to for our dairy replacements and we kept working the size of the dairy up—with the milking machine we could do this, see.

Rosemarie: And that made—meant more feed?

Don: Yes, uh-huh, but we still had some feed to sell too, we had a little, but not a large amount of feed.

Rosemarie: Basically you were raising it for, still again, for your animals. You just had more animals and the reasoning being the milking machine helped that.

Don: Right. Um-hm.

Rosemarie: Now did you have any hired help here? Anytime here during the forties let's say, during war time and—?

Don: Yes. We had some hired help. In, I guess, probably the late forties and in the fifties we had hired help too.

Rosemarie: Did you hire them at certain times of the year or did you hire them—?

Don: No, we kept—I'll tell you in forty-nine I purchased the farm just north of me, where I'm living, and at that time then we put a married man in the house and we had help, but of course we also milked on that farm so we didn't have a lot of help down here doing the chores, as far as that goes.

Rosemarie: No, that was true. Alright, so you said in forty-four you rented some acreage. Now, did you keep renting that or did you give that up?

Don: I dropped that in about fifty, I think. I rented it, I think, one year after I was on there and I just dropped it, then.

Rosemarie: So in forty-nine then, you bought another—?

Don: —Yeah, it was a hundred and fourteen acres so that gave me, let's see—around two hundred acres or so, a little more than that.

Rosemarie: That you owned?

Don: Well, no, ya see, I still didn't own the home farm. I didn't own the home farm until actually my father sold it to us, because he had two other farms and there were only three children and then he sold me my farm in the fifties.

Rosemarie: —So actually you didn't own the home farm?

Don: No.

Rosemarie: But you owned this new piece that you bought?

Don: Yeah.

Rosemarie: And you still rented the other piece one year after that?

Don: Yeah.

Rosemarie: Alright. Now, just before we move too much into the fifties, we can move into the fifties and kinda talk about the fact that that's when your father sold you the home farm, so then now you had given up the rental farm, but you had about two hundred acres between the two pieces. Were they connected?

Don: Yes.

Rosemarie: They were connected. Now, in the fifties, your children were about what age? Let's say fifty-two, fifty-three, fifty-four—

Don: Well, of course the last daughter was born in forty-nine so she was young and the boy was born in forty and the girl, a couple years ahead of that, so that kind of gives you an idea the age of them.

Rosemarie: So, pretty much the boy was about twelve or thirteen at the time I'm talking about. So where did they go to school?

Don: Well, up until—I can't recall just whether it was the late forties or the early fifties, but a third of a mile east of here was, it's now a house, but it was a school house. So they merely had to go to a country school about a third of a mile down the road, but I was quite active in consolidation of schools and I know people criticized me for it because they said I had it made because I was so close to being to the school—

Rosemarie: (Laughter)

Don: —but I thought there was a greater opportunity for the children. Not only in possibly the area of education, but also in the social because it used to be you could more or less tell the country girls when they came into school is how they dressed, but after you got the consolidated schools they all looked the same. You couldn't tell whether it was a farm girl or one from town.

Rosemarie: And of course, that is so important to them—

Don: —To children of that age, yes, it is.

Rosemarie: It's very important what their peers look like and what their peers think about them.

Don: I don't know whether consolidation of schools did as much educationally because I still have fond memories of the old one room school because if your child was intelligent they not only learned, if they were in second or third grade, but they could learn up to what fourth and fifth graders were doing also and—

Rosemarie: —That's true. That's true.

Don: —But socially there was a big advantage.

Rosemarie: Um-hm. There was indeed. How about, let's talk about a typical day in the fifties. Now we moved up from twenty years here practically, but let's talk about your typical farm day, in say, when your son was twelve, your oldest child was about twelve. What would be your day?

Don: Well, we got up early in the mornings. Sometimes at, you know, four-thirty, quarter to five and we tried to get done about six-thirty at night, but sometimes we would also take the—see we got rid of the horses, so we could take a tractor to the field and work them after dark because that wasn't inhumane to work that tractor with lights on out there.

(Laughter)

Rosemarie: But it wasn't humane to work the horses at night in the dark.

Don: Right. Yeah, but so—

Rosemarie: —So you'd go out first thing in the morning, you'd go milk or what would you do first?

Don: Yeah, we always milked first and then we would come in and have the breakfast just like we did when I was home and then we'd finish up the chores outside and then take the tractors to the field and you know—then, but—we always, we never liked to be in the barn all night like you see some lights in the dairy farm, so we would come up and milk either regular time at five o'clock or four-thirty, something like that at night, and then in the busy time we would take the tractors to the field after we had our dinner or supper or whatever you wanted to call it, see.

Rosemarie: Well, some farmers, the reason they had their lights on so late is that they worked out on the field very late, then they'd come in and milk.

Don: Yeah, um-hm.

Rosemarie: Seems like when you're coming in from the fields you oughta be done. (Laughter) So maybe you're right. So you'd come in earlier and milk at the regular time and then go back out in the field and then plow or whatever it is you were doing with the lights on.

Don: I always looked around me and I found out that the farmer that was in the barn late at nights, during the working season, he kinda got in a rut and he was in the barn late at nights in the winter and when it wasn't really necessary for him to be and so I think it's a bad habit to get it. Now, my son in law that operates with me now, they are done even earlier. They are usually done milking by five-thirty and it takes them a little while to clean up and they will be done, all done, at six o'clock then and I think that's the right way to operate a dairy farm.

Rosemarie: Alright, so then when you came in, you came in at six-thirty, but you came in at four-thirty or five o'clock and milked the cows and did you eat then and then go out or did you go out and then eat when you came back?

Don: Well, we would eat right after milking, then the cows at night—

Rosemarie: And eat dinner right after, I mean supper—supper right after milking and then, if necessary, go back out.

Don: Yes. This was only when we were planting, you know, or maybe harvesting or something like that, that we felt we should be doing.

Rosemarie: Do you feel that in planting and in harvesting, what you're really fighting is time and weather? You're trying to get the corn in or oats in before it rains for ten days straight and you can't get out there and do that and is that what you're fighting, the weather?

Don: Yes, uh-huh. And the weather can be either awfully good to ya or awfully bad to ya, you know. Whichever way it is, ya know.

Rosemarie: But that's why you spend such long days getting it done.

Don: Yes, yes.

Rosemarie: —to get it done at that time. Did you at any time, in this particular period work off your farm for somebody else, except in terms of when you did threshing with each other, that I wouldn't consider.

Don: Well, we did some custom baling and we started this in about the latter forty, forty-seven, I think is when we—I did some custom bailing. In fact, I possibly, if I would back track just a little, one of the things I thought to be kinda patriotic to do was, they told us to do this, was to buy a war bond every month so this is what we did, is buy a war bond every month. Well, then after the war was over in forty-five, machinery, not right away, but it slowly became available, better machinery, and things like this. Well, this is what I spent my war bonds on, as well as the farm that I purchased in forty-nine, see. But the farm machinery and the bigger the machinery or the more modern it got, the easier farming got to be. We started to combine and bale in forty-seven and then I can remember we took our first vacation in forty-eight. Now, maybe that was a belated honeymoon because we never took a honeymoon before.

(Laughter)

Rosemarie: And you hadn't had a vacation before that?

Don: Nope.

Rosemarie: And your father didn't take vacations when he was farming?

Don: No. Now, when I say we hadn't had a vacation, we called a vacation, we would go up to the Wisconsin State Fair and I would get somebody into milk one day or possibly we'd go to Chicago, but dairy farmer, it's a very confining occupation.

Rosemarie: Because of the livestock.

Don: Because of the livestock, yes.

Rosemarie: It's—yes. I can see where it would be. So you'd go up, maybe, to the Wisconsin State Fair or you'd go into Chicago for a day. Now, did you ever go over to somebody else's farm and do—milk for them so they can go someplace?

Don: No, I don't think I ever did. I did help, in the latter fifties, a farmer, but this is when I had the—I had a couple—well, my son-in-law and my son that was farming with me. I did go over and help do chores for someone that got real ill, you know.

Rosemarie: But that was not for a vacation or something like that?

Don: Oh, no. Not at all.

(end of segment 5)

Rosemarie: So, then, you got your first vacation. How did that come about?

Don: Well, uh, I know I got out of debt in forty-one. I can remember this and I had quite an older car and I had enough money left to—in forty one, to buy me a new car and uh—but I thought, well I've struggled along and I wanted just a little cushion, so I bought a used car for, well actually three hundred dollars of my old car, but it was a good car, but, you know, then, I didn't—You couldn't buy a new car during the war years.

Rosemarie: Yeah, of course not.

Don: And so in forty-seven, I got my first new car. I had to wait a little longer for it.

(Laughter)

Rosemarie: Yeah, because you had to wait through the war time.

Don: So, yeah. Then we took our first vacation at forty-eight. We went out to Yellowstone and the Badlands and Mount Rushmore and then had about seven or eight days away.

Rosemarie: You and your wife—

Don: —Yes.

Rosemarie: And did you take children?

Don: Two children.

Rosemarie: Two children?

Don: Two children.

Rosemarie: The oldest was, uh, did you take—

Don: —Well, let's see, uh—

Rosemarie: —At that age, let's see. One was born in forty.

Don: Yeah.

Rosemarie: So, did you take the youngest?

Don: Yeah, well the one wasn't born yet.

Rosemarie: Oh, okay.

Don: So it would have been the two oldest children. The one was born in forty-nine.

Rosemarie: Well, what has happened to the cows while you were gone?

Don: Well, we had a neighbor come in and milk the cows and I had had a boy kinda workin' for me, a young man, I should call him. He's actually in high school and so between the two of them they got the cows milked and in real good shape.

Rosemarie: And when you came back everything was alright?

Don: Right.

Rosemarie: Oh, that's wonderful. Well, that's wonderful you got a vacation because it seems that they are very—they [cows] do tie you down.

Don: Yeah.

Rosemarie: And, anyway, you still got more equipment and so forth? What were you doing? Now, let's move on into the fifties again, what did you do for recreation then? You had a radio certainly, in the fifties.

Don: Well, in forty-nine, uh—we got our first television. So, this actually changed quite a little of the way, in other words, we kinda stopped going to the movies and I don't know whether it was because it was new, but I still think television was better—programs were better—then, than they are now.

Rosemarie: At forty-nine, you must be very progressive, like you father, because your father got this crystal [radio] set so early and you got a television set in forty-nine. That's—that's very interesting. So, then you didn't go to movies as much?

Don: Not nearly as much, no.

Rosemarie: What about visiting—well, ya went to Farm Bureau activities, of course. Did you belong to any other organizations?

Don: Well, I was on the ASCS. [Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service]. See, government plays quite a role in farming and I started out as a township representative, ASCS. township representative, and then finally I think I spent almost, well, probably around fifteen years on the county committee, which took some of my time. In other words, and, of course, then there was—I always belonged to what we called then, The Pure Milk Association, and different things—I held different positions in that. In other words, I was president of Pure Milk Association District Five, which covered about five counties and part of Wisconsin, and so you kind of start to—after you get established, you kinda get to see what you can do for your community, as well as for yourself. Of course, I think everyone, when the children are small, that's your main interest and almost your sole interest. Isn't it?

Rosemarie: Yes. It certainly is. I would think so too. And so that is basically what you did. You stayed around home, but you know I have been remiss here about not really talking about two things: One, farm prices for your milk because you were selling this milk and the government policy in effect. Now, we talked about wartime. Keeping a lid on things so that there wasn't inflation, so when we came out at the end of wartime, into the late forties and early fifties, what was the situation as far as prices for milk?

Don: Milk wasn't, you know, expensive. And, of course, it still isn't expensive, not compared with other things. If you take, like, the price of milk during the depression and then uh—like, the price of an automobile and there's no comparison at all, you know, even though, you know, automobiles were very cheap right in, like,

thirty-three, I know my dad he bought a new automobile, in thirty-three, from Chevrolet, a six-cylinder, for five hundred and thirty-nine dollars.

Rosemarie: So, you are saying the price of an automobile then, versus the price of milk, and the price of an automobile now versus the price of milk. That there's been a great increase—a greater increase in the price of an automobile than there has been in the price of milk, over the period of time?

Don: Right.

Rosemarie: That's because even though we consider an automobile important, it's not as essential as milk, I guess.

(Laughter)

Rosemarie: So, anyway, what do you think about government policy—I mean, what opinion do you have with government policy after the war and in those fifties period?

Don: Well, I think I went on the county committee shortly and during the latter part of the fifties, maybe fifty-seven, fifty-eight, somewhere in there. And I think the first government program that really ever seemed to work was the one that came with the Kennedy administration and it just—it restricted, in other words, the farmer didn't farm all of his land, but he tried to produce for what he had a market for and right now we have seemed to have kind of lost sight of producing for the market. We're—I think a little confused at the present time, but that program really seemed to work and then of course as we worked into the latter sixties we started to export more. And between—we emptied our bins through the programs in the sixties and then when our exports started to grow it led to the very profitable seventies as far as agriculture was concerned. The government programs, at best, are hard to control and they are very essential, but were very lacking, and I guess I'm talking probably about present times. But we probably need some kind of an export board even though there are enough federal agencies, but we should have someone that is really out their selling. Because—and we don't have this—we just rely on the big grain companies to make the deals across for us and there—unless—well, I know the automobiles for example. When they have a big backlog of automobiles they'll offer incentives as cheap financing and they can move out hundreds of thousands of automobiles of the last year's model. We don't have anyone selling

like that for us and we're the only country that don't have a agricultural export board.

Rosemarie: —Export board, yeah. You talked about raising for the market, you know, at this time under the Kennedy program there, you raised for the market, but you could live on that, and then there was a time, remember, or after that, much later than that, when they talked about planting from fencerow to fencerow and trying to produce as much as you could and that's when, I guess, the exports started. But, then planting from fencerow to fencerow, if you have too much, a surplus, then the price drops, and this I think is a problem and I don't know how you get around this. You tell a farmer, "Don't produce quite so much now because we don't need so much," but he has to produce much, supposedly, to pay off his debts, mortgages, and so forth. On the other hand, when he does do this then the price drops and I'm not so sure how one gets around this or out of this.

Don: It's not easy, of course, one of the thing that has affected us very adversely and I don't know when this will be corrected, is the taxes on our land. Because as the services were needed and educational costs rose, they not only raised the rate of taxation, but also the valuation on everything, see, and it used to be that my father made a comfortable living on eighty acres of land and now, I think, an average sized farm could make a comfortable living would be somewhere, depending on how much livestock is on it, somewhere between four hundred and seven hundred acres and so this gives—you have an awful lot of tax to pay on this land before you get anything out of it. In other words, the taxes—

Rosemarie: —are by the acre—

Don: —Yes, it's valued by the acre and as well as your farm buildings and everything, so there needs some—to be some readjustment in that area. I'm not saying farm prices have to go down, but some of our costs have to—have to go up. I'm not saying farm prices have to go up, some of our costs have to go down.

Rosemarie: And one of those you are thinking of is taxes, right? Taxing so heavily on the acreage because you need more to run, course, the reason you can run four hundred and seventy-five acres is because of the modern equipment that you have, which is also very expensive too.

Don: Yes.

Rosemarie: And, when one tends—you spoke earlier about when we were talking about days gone by when you made some money off of planting this hybrid corn and when you made some money off your good crop of oats and so you bought a little bit more equipment, a little more modern equipment and so this is perfectly natural for a farmer to not necessarily to buy all these things, but to go in debt a bit to buy some certain equipment. And it seems that in recent years, when prices were very good, in the seventies, people bought more acreage and more farm equipment and went into debt quite frequently. And then when we have surplus and the prices go down they have a hard time meeting those payments.

Don: Well, when the farming became to look better in the seventies a lot of farmers tried to make rooms for their sons, and the only way you could make room for someone else in agriculture takes great capital outlays and this is where a lot of the farmers got in trouble and as—right now, I think it's pretty hard to persuade a young farmer—or a young many just getting out of college with a farm background to go into farming, he's going to look around for something else. But at the time when farming was profitable he was real interested going into farming and so then he comes along and some of those young farmers even bought land of their own at very inflated prices and this is what caused the problems.

Rosemarie: Yeah, see, your father was able to help two sons start out. I forgot to ask what happened to your sister, but anyway— (laughter).

Don: Well he uh—he also had a farm for to—her and his son-in-law to go on over there.

Rosemarie: Oh, so helped—see, he was able, not only to—you had—you had what was modern at the time, for example, you had a crystal [radio] set. That was very modern at the time, so you had quite a few things that were modern at the time and you were able to live quite a decent life on that small amount of acreage and he was able to start three boys—two boys and a girl, who were willing to work hard, but still, he was able to start those people up. And a man today, to be able to start his son out, farming, even with him, it's perhaps too prohibitively expensive, I might say.

Don: Right now.

(end of segment 6)

Rosemarie: Okay, well then after the war prices were pretty good in the fifties and then did they go down before the—the seventies came? Did they go down in the sixties at all? You said, "We emptied our bins." That was when the export came.

Don: Yeah, well, during the fifties the government program tend to—there was a lot of stored corn in the bins and they had a support price and it was never a good price. It was somewhere between a dollar and a dollar twenty a bushel if I remember correctly. That's all—

Rosemarie: —Which wasn't terribly good.

Don: No.

Rosemarie: —But it still was something.

Don: Yeah. It was something. Well, then, uh, as—when the program come along in the sixties and when emptied the bins, and then our exports grew in the latter parts of the sixties and the early seventies. That's what produced it—our good times in agriculture.

Rosemarie: Good times in the seventies, yeah? Those are golden years when you look back on them.

(Laughter)

Don: Yes.

Rosemarie: But it did— lots of—but the value of the people that bought land at that time, as you mentioned the inflated value of the land and now it's not worth that anymore.

Don: No. This is—and of course they used that land for collateral, see, in their operation even. This is one of the difficult things in farming, is it requires so much capital. Now, anyone with moderate means that is anything but a farmer, he wouldn't invest all of his money in one thing. In other words, he isn't going to buy all IBM stuff, no matter how good he thinks it is. He will diversify his investments. Agriculture takes so much capital that you have to seems—put all of your money back into the one thing and of course, when that one thing goes bad you could be in trouble, see, especially if you borrowed money against it.

Rosemarie: Yes, and as you were mentioning the capital outlet, no one can—you buy on a farm with a mortgage and then you cannot expect that farm to both support you and pay the mortgage—

Don: —That's true.

Rosemarie: —That's one of the problems. I talked—I heard about that not too long ago and supposing you were a city boy, but you had to have a farm background, raised on a farm but lived in a city, and you decided you wanted to go back to farming and you had fifty, sixty thousand dollars or a hundred thousand, say. It doesn't really matter too much what. And you went out and bought a farm and paid a certain amount of money down and paid a certain amount of money for used equipment, you still would—you can't support your family on that farm and also pay off your mortgage.

Don: That's probably true.

Rosemarie: That's where the problem is. So, people can't buy farms even if they want to very frequently because they don't have the capital out flow to run it. But businesses find the same sort of thing. They have to—to run a business you have to stock your shelves and if you have to buy all that stock you have so much invested in stock that your income goes to replenishing the stock on your shelves and there's a question about what you eat.

(Laughter)

Alright, well, I don't want to dwell to long on that, but, alright, why don't we talk about the sixties and seventies because that's a good time. Now, by the sixties and seventies your oldest boy would be how old?

Don: Well, probably the biggest change that we, uh—my son, I think, graduated in fifty-eight, from high school, and he didn't want to go to college. He said—he told me he would go if I just wanted him to go for a good time. And I said, "No," I said, "if that's the only reason you're goin' to college, why—," and then, of course, I think, that was also the same time as my oldest daughter got married, in about fifty-eight. So, I had two people here to kind of make room for in the farming because my son-in-law was a truck driver and he didn't like his occupation very well and my daughter, I guess, liked it even less. And, so, they came and both started to farm with me on a percentage basis. In other words, I didn't want them as hired men, but I would take them in on a percentage basis.

Rosemarie: On a certain percent of the profit, then?

Don: Yes, and, well, they just shared everything and my son, he just farmed two years and then he decided he wanted to go to college.

(Laughter)

Rosemarie: How do you work—how do you live while you're waiting for your percentage?

Don: Well, I did pay them in advance. I forget just what because your—

Rosemarie: —I was wondering how you worked this. That's all I'm asking.

Don: —Yea.

Rosemarie: Because I have to eat now, even though you're not selling the crop yet.

Don: Sure. Yeah, I paid them so much a month and then at the end of the year we figured up to get their percentage, see, and so it worked actually—well it must have worked real well because my son-in-law is still with me and that's, from fifty-eight to eighty-six, is almost thirty years, see?

Rosemarie: My goodness, yes.

Don: And, but my son, he—I think he got tired of hours of milking cows and he went on to college and he's in another occupation at the present time.

Rosemarie: I see, I see. Where did they live when they were working with you?

Don: Well, my son-in-law lived in the house that I built to replace the one that burned and it was kind of a small house, I mean, well, it's got three bedrooms, but it isn't a large house. We had built this house, well, considerably before that because we anticipated getting a hired man to live in the other house and instead of building a house for a hired man I built this home because I'd thought I'd retire here then, after awhile.

Rosemarie: Yea, so you built this home for yourself and you were going to give the hired man your other house. Now, what about that married couple that lived up on that ranch, that's a long time before

perhaps, but did that house go on, on that other piece of property that you bought?

Don: Well, we did use that house for a married man even when my son-in-law farmed with me because we kept increasing—well, I bought another farm in the early sixties—

Rosemarie: Oh, I should have asked you if you added—you'd been adding all along that's a—

Don: Yeah, by small amounts—

Rosemarie: —And you started out and you gave up the farm, you bought the other. So, then, in the early sixties, you bought about how many more acres?

Don: Uh, it was a hundred and twenty then in the early sixties.

Rosemarie: So, that made the whole part and parcel how much, that you?

Don: Well, I must've actually owned then about three hundred and oh forty to fifty acres, something like that. Three hundred and forty to fifty acres, see.

Rosemarie: And when did you build this house, then?

Don: Uh, in fifty-four, so, see, my house must be thirty-two years old.

Rosemarie: Um-hm. So, then your son-in-law kept on working with you—

Don: —Yes.

Rosemarie: —and your son went off. And your other child was still growing up at this point. So, then, what happened in the early sixties? Your son was now either going to college or—

Don: —Well, you know, we skipped through the period of the fifties of the Korean War, which—

Rosemarie: —Oh! We should talk about that—we should—

Don: —it really didn't affect me. Now, probably some people it surely did, but then, see my son, he went to college for four years and he took ROTC so he came out, I believe it was first lieutenant or second lieutenant, whatever they are when they came out. Of course, he was in the Vietnam conflict, there. And, but uh, he spent

two years over there and he was one of the fortunate ones to come back.

Rosemarie: To come back, yeah. That's wonderful. So, now that, when did he come back from that, that would be sixty.

Don: Yea, let's see. Fifty-eight, sixty, sixty-four, probably around sixty-six.

Rosemarie: Yea, ok, so he was in—yea, alright, so he was in that era. Yea, there was the Korean War and then there was space and then there was—because the Korean War was in the early fifties and then the Vietnamese War was in the sixties.

Don: Right, kind of the middle sixties. I believe it escalated under the Johnson administration 'cause one of the things that most people read and didn't believe that at the time they sent my son over there that they had really escalated the war and—

Rosemarie: —From the fifty to one hundred observers they had over there—

Don: —Yeah, and uh, I think it was probably transportation logistics, but anyways, when he got over there he didn't have a gun and he was very concerned. I'd read about it, but I didn't believe it until I got his first letter and he was one that purchased supplies. Of course, he was an officer, see, and he purchased supplies and he said that he flew—had to fly over enemy territories and the only gun they had was the gun in the airplane with uh, it was on a turret, you know, he said if we ever crashes it—

Rosemarie: —It wouldn't have done us any good.

Don: It wouldn't of done any good at all and so—

Rosemarie: Well, that's, that's like broomsticks, ya know? And years ago they used to talk about practicing, because they didn't have guns for people to practice with, they would practice with broomsticks.

How—what other changes can you think of that occurred in the farm, let's just talk about the dairy and the crop raising and you talked about herbicides and pesticides, so we can talk about those a little bit, but when did you—that was towards the—herbicides in the middle of the sixties and pesticides into the seventies then, basically.

Don: Yea, well, both practices, of course, increased yields. The—I think with our hybrid corn we'd got up to something over a hundred bushels to the acre with, you might say, with minimal fertilization. And then with the heavier fertilization and with the thicker planting, which you could do with the use of herbicides, and then of course, it became necessary to use pesticides too if you followed corn after corn. But anyway, I think our top yields probably got up to about a hundred and sixty bushels to the acre, see?

Rosemarie: Um-hm. That's quite a bit different, isn't it?

Don: Yes. And, of course, I'm talking about number two corn after (unintelligible), too. So, and in fact, you contrast that with when I started—I can remember the year before I started to farm, we looked at the tenant that was on this farm and I can remember the remark. My dad says, "I think his corn really looks good. I think he should get fifty bushel to the acre."

Rosemarie: (Laughter) Certainly a difference, isn't it?

Don: Yes.

Rosemarie: And, especially if— now, in the sixties, how were the prices in the sixties and before we came to the glowing seventies?

Don: Uh, as I say, the prices weren't good. Farming, you know, wasn't real good. It was more or less a living and a little besides if you wanted to work hard at it. And uh, but, uh—of course, we didn't get the inflation until the seventies and it was the inflation of the seventies, you know, coupled now with the lower prices is what is so difficult.

Rosemarie: True, True.

(end of segment seven)

Rosemarie: Alright, in the sixties and seventies, what types of things did you do then for recreation? You had a TV set of course. Any sort of activities that you can think of? Now, this is when your son-in-law is working with you and so forth.

Don: It didn't make a lot of difference for us to have help. I think you always thought when you were back farming alone that, boy, just to get away from the dairy farm, if you could, you know. But it didn't make a lot of difference to what we do the day off isn't as

valuable as you think it might be when they're easy to come by, ya know? (Laughter)

Rosemarie: I was going to say. Did you have more days off? Were you able to go—?

Don: —Uh, I probably did more work in the community. I know at that time I was not only on the Farm Bureau Board, but I think I spent nine years on the School Board and, like I said, I was president of the Pure Milk Association. I spent more of my time in other duties, you know.

Rosemarie: But you didn't necessarily spend more time going to Chicago or going up to Wisconsin?

Don: No.

Rosemarie: Did you ever do any hunting or fishing? Was that ever part of your—?

Don: Uh, I did a little bit of hunting, but not fishing. I was always going to learn to fish when I retired.

(Laughter)

Rosemarie: Well, that's good. What sort of plans did you have for your retirement, if any? I mean, now, twenty, twenty-five years ago? Let's try that.

Don: Well, I took up golf. I forgot about that. I took up golf because I thought, well, you know, I've been active all my life and I wanted to stay active after retirement. So, I took up golf, so I spent some time playing golf and then we do take—well, at least, we try to take one or two escorted tours to see more of the country, you know, and I have—then, of course—

Rosemarie: —When did you start doing that?

Don: Well, we—ya know, when it's hard for ya to get away, you'll make such an effort to get away. We always tried to get uh, ever since we took the one trip in forty-eight, we always—

Rosemarie: —to Yellowstone?

Don: Yeah, we always tried to—we've taken several trips to Florida, like, for two weeks at a time. You know, and uh—

Rosemarie: —When was the best time of year for you to do that?

Don: Well, usually in the winter—

Rosemaire: —Usually in the winter?

Don: Yeah. We've been out there—we went out to California and saw the Rose Bowl parade and things like that, but that was in the winter, too. And, so—'cause it is hard to get away in the summer as long as I was active in farming.

Rosemarie: Right, right. So, then you continued with this extra acreage. Did you ever add any more to the amount of acreage you had?

Don: Yes, I bought a farm right at the time that land had peaked, but it was a small, so I was fortunate.

(Laughter)

But uh, I guess I've operated with a different philosophy than, uh—and this is the upbringing you have. In other words, sometimes your folks are strict, but you remember some of the things they tell ya and they were so wise, you know, and the older you get you realize how wise they were

(Laughter)

But anyway, I can remember when I bought my first farm which was in forty-nine, which was, you know, four years after the close of the war and things were slipping a little as far as agricultural prices were concerned. My father says to me, "I think if you had waited a few years you could have bought a hundred and sixty for the same price you bought this hundred and fourteen acres." And I says, "Well," I says, "this land lay right next to mine," and I says, "I felt like I could handle it," and I says, "I had enough money to pay for it." 'Cause I bought these bonds all during the war time, to be patriotic, but I found out they did me some good too," and so he says, "Well, you've got no problem then." He says, "If you can pay for it you've got no problem, no matter what you gave for it." And that's—

Rosemarie: —Well, you might not have had that money a few years later too. You might have spent it on something else then.

Don: (Laughter) Might have, yea. And that was the same way with the land that I bought in eighty or eighty-one, I can't remember what it was, but uh, I gave—it wasn't a good investment because it's worth about half what it is now, but the only thing is I paid for it right away.

Rosemarie: You were able to pay for it—because yes, if you had bought it, as many people did, with a big mortgage on it, then you would have trouble because it would be mortgaged for a lot more than it's actually worth.

Don: See, I can remember, when we went through the depression we never, as children, we never suffered like some of the people did. Because my dad always said, "I never was just been happened to be in debt at that time." He didn't happen to be in debt. He hadn't expanded, see. And, you know, sometimes it's merely the era that you live in as why you are in debt at that time, you know. So, then—

Rosemarie: —Because most farmers are in debt at some time.

Don: Oh, sure!

Rosemarie: And this is the way farming goes. It's also the way a family life goes. I mean, you're right. I think your father just happened to be, at that time, not in debt.

Don: That's right. See, then he bought two farms in thirty-three and thirty-four when the prices were way down, you know.

Rosemarie: He was able to do that.

Don: Yea, so, it's—sometimes it's the time era that you live, that gets you in trouble.

Rosemarie: Why did you happen to buy something in eighty-one?

Don: Actually, the average farm now, I think, in DeKalb county is four hundred acres. So, I merely got an average farm now. I was actually a little below average or would have been by now, see, and the more land you had the easier it is, as far as spreading the costs of your equipment out, like a combine, now, depending on the size you get, but they'll run, I think the smallest one, would run between sixty and seventy thousand [dollars] and the larger ones are over a hundred thousand. Well, if you can spread that out over,

say, two hundred acres of corn it's a lot better than trying to spread it out over a hundred a fifty acres of corn.

Rosemarie: Yes, that's true. The more you can use it—it's kind of unusual in a way that these pieces of equipment cost so much, yet everybody has their own. You don't go back to the threshing, you know, saying, "Okay, Let's all chip in and buy a combine and then we'll use it," and I think the trouble is that they all need it at exactly the same time.

Don: Yea, well, now, my son-in-law, the last combine we bought—see the first four year old combine I bought was rather an obsolete model, I mean they quit making it that year and I can remember it cost me about eleven thousand dollars and that was a four year old machine. Now, just recently, we used that machine and it gave us good service for thirteen years and then we sold it and we bought a, my son-in-law now, bought a machine, but he bought a used one and you can do this, too, see. But he even gave thirty thousand for the used one. It's a four year old machine, it isn't a bigger machine, but it's a better machine than the one we had prior to that, you know. So, I think that it won't prove—you can't prove it with a pencil that you should buy a machine, every farmer should own his own combine, but a lot of times you can lose a half of a bean crop or a third of a bean crop by not having your own machine to get in there; if you are waiting for someone to come.

Rosemarie: Yes, I would imagine.

Don: Uh, back when I custom baling, that was exceptionally good money I was making in the fifties, we'd make a hundred dollars a day and that was a lot of money with a tractor and a baler. But before, even though it cost me the hundred dollars, when I cut down hay, I would always allow one day for the bailer to set vacant, not in use, so it would sure be ready for my hay because I didn't want my hay to get rained on or something like that see, so it cost me a hundred dollars, I billed him that. And a lot of times you would maybe break down with a bailer or they had more hay then they said they would and I would need that whole day, many times I would need the whole day, so that—but the next day I was always ready to go get my own hay because my own hay was ready, see.

Rosemarie: Well, let's wind up by telling what happened—you own now about an average size farm [four hundred acres] and your son-in-law, does he own any of his own or is he working your farm?

Don: We're actually on a sharecrop lease and, of course, the dairy, like I said, kept increasing with the milking machines and when I took the two of them in we put up a parlor and we are now milking about eighty cows, well, actually our herd is about ninety to ninety-five cows and the milking machine that they use are very modern compared to what we used, even twenty years ago, because they have the automatic take off when a cow is through milking rather than leaving the machine on too long and damaging the utter of a cow. The machine is automatic take offs and so as soon as the cow is through milking the machine automatically comes off by its own self, eliminating the human element.

Rosemarie: You had to be very, very, careful then on this damaging earlier when you were using these machines.

Don: Oh, yes.

Rosemaire: I didn't realize that. Not knowing that much about milking. Not even being able to milk a cow. And so, uh, he operates this during the winter time, but you do come home during the summer? You say you take a vacation—

Don: —Yea.

Rosemarie: —and you go down—I shouldn't say it's a vacation anymore because it's quite long, but you go down to Florida and live. What months do you usually go down?

Don: Well, we usually go just ahead of Thanksgiving and then we come back around the first of April, so we're down about four months.

Rosemarie: So you come home basically for the planting and the harvesting.

Don: Yes, and I kinda—see, what do they call it. I can't just recall what you call it, but anyway, I'm kind of a nursemaid for the pigs. I take care of the pigs when they're furrowing and I get back in time to do that.

Rosemarie: So you come back then. And he operates it during the winter time then?

Don: Yes, uh-huh. But he has help, too, ya know. He has help.

Rosemarie: How many hired hands does he—

Don: Well, he's kind of fortunate. He's got four sons.

(Both laugh)

Don: And, uh, two of them are actually helping him quite a little. One is actually into long distance hauling—or not long distance hauling, but he's doing some trucking and probably doing this because agriculture isn't that favorable right now.

Rosemarie: Well, Don. I want to thank you very much for this interview. I really appreciate it and I appreciate your time in telling us about the changes in farmland.

(end of interview)