

The Farmer's Cow Oral History Project

Graywall Farms, Lebanon, Connecticut

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Interviewee: Robin Chesmer (RC), Graywall Farms

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LINDA CHASE: So how did you end up at Graywall Farms?

ROBIN CHESMER: Ever since I was a child I always wanted to be a farmer, but I wasn't brought up in an agricultural environment. I was born in England; and I was raised in post-war, they call it council housing, which is government-funded housing and very, very small lots. It was a duplex, and my parents' neighbor was a milk inspector. He was a real nice guy, and he took me out when he went on occasion visiting farms. And I loved it, at a very young age. And it just stuck with me through my life. When I was four years old my parents went to Norway on a holiday for two weeks. And this neighbor had since moved onto a farm as a caretaker for an elderly person. Anyway, I stayed with them on the farm for two weeks. And that was it. It was a mixed farm; they had everything. They had dairy cows, they had horses, they had pigs, they had sheep, they had chickens, they grew vegetables. So it was a neat experience; I loved it. And every summer I went back for two weeks. And I remember kicking my parents away when they'd come to pick me up; I didn't want to go home. Those memories stick with me today.

LC: Formative, you could say.

RC: Right.

LC: So did you have a farm before you had this one here?

RC: Well, my parents emigrated to Canada when I was eight. Then they moved down to Connecticut. I had relatives in Canada, my aunt and uncle. In summers I'd go stay up there. Actually one summer, I think I was eleven years old, I got on the train in Hartford by myself and went to Montreal. And they picked me up at the other end at the train station. Anyway, my uncle was a carpenter, and he did carpentry work for a pretty well-off family that had a dairy farm as a sideline. I went with him to that dairy farm, and I managed to work it so I could stay there for a couple of weeks. And I just got further engrossed in it.

As I grew up my parents bought a house; it was in a subdivision, a 200 by 200 lot. And I had rabbits and pigeons, and then I befriended a neighbor with some land and I was able to raise some chickens. I actually started the chickens in my parents' basement. The chicken coop wasn't done, and the chickens had feathers and they were perching

on the pipes in the basement. [Laughter] So every opportunity I'd love to go to a farm, visit it. And I'd help out if I could, wherever I could – haying or whatever. Then when I was a teenager I started raising calves. And my parents moved to another place in Windham Center, had a little bit more acreage, and I was able to rent some land next door and a barn. And I had a menagerie. I had horses and beef cattle and chickens and turkeys and ducks and sheep and pigs and the whole bit.

After I got married we were looking around for a home, and we were looking for a place with some land. We were able to purchase a house here in Lebanon with thirty-five acres of land. Then I repeated what I did as a kid; I had a menagerie again. Then I started raising dairy replacements. I'd buy heifer calves from local farms. When I moved to town there were thirty-five active dairy farms. Today I think there are four, something like that. Anyway, I'd buy dairy calves, and I'd raise them up for replacements. And the neighbor behind [Oliver Manning], who abutted my property, was looking to retire. And I thought, well that would be neat, I'd like to operate a dairy farm. It's what I've always wanted to do. So I worked it out with him where I purchased the herd and the equipment and leased the farm. And during the lease term he sold the development rights to the state of Connecticut. This was in the late eighties, early nineties, when real estate values were really very high. High as they are now actually. So anyway the Farmland Preservation Program was a key component in allowing us to buy the farm and get into the dairy business. In that three year span, at the end of it I was able to execute and buy the farm. So that was 1989. This past June was our twentieth anniversary of actually operating a real dairy farm.

LC: What made you choose dairy over anything else?

RC: I always liked cows. I just like the whole operation. I always liked the milking procedure. It really appealed to me. Probably because of what I was exposed to; it really stuck with me. Although I have to admit I like other aspects of it. You kind of get focused on one aspect, but I do enjoy poultry and pigs and sheep; I enjoyed raising those. So I enjoy all aspects of it; it just happened to be that dairy... Well, dairy is a year-round agricultural operation, so there's a consistency to it, and a consistency on cash flow too.

LC: So did you ever study farming at all, or did you learn it by doing it?

RC: No, I never... I didn't belong to 4H. I wish I had; I just never really... I don't know. My parents were not farmers at all. My mother was brought up in London; she was a real city girl. My father is an engineer, and he has a real engineer's mind. They couldn't understand me wanting to be a farmer. I'd talk about being a farmer as something I wanted to do, and they always tried to talk me out of it. You know, "You should be a dentist." [Laughter] So, no, I didn't have any formal training. I picked it all up just by talking to people. And really when I bought the farm I was clueless. I always had animals, and you'd feed a beef cow. I knew they had to be fed [laughs], and you'd give them a ration; but I never really thought about what I was doing. When I bought the dairy farm it soon became evident to me that I wasn't just feeding a cow.

The cow is a ruminant. [With] a ruminant, basically you're feeding a bacterial fermentation vat; and you have to keep the rumen flora happy to have a healthy, productive cow. So that was a real learning experience. Then I started really thinking about things and availing myself of...you know, attending courses and taking field trips, etc. That's kind of how I backed into it.

LC: Well, it worked.

RC: [Laughs]

LC: So this farm has grown substantially since you started?

RC: Yes. When I first came here there were eighty cows and some young stock and equipment, and we milked two times a day in a double-four milking parlor. We did that for a number of years and grew it a bit. Then Lincoln, my son, who was always an excellent help on the farm...he was a good help. But he was never, "Oh, I want to be a farmer when I grow up." He was active in school sports, etc. And like I say he was a real good help. Mechanically, he's a better mechanic than I am. I'm not even a mechanic. [Laughs] But he had a good aptitude for it, and he worked hard. He was a good help with haying, etc. But he was artistic – takes after his mother – and really had good artistic skills and ability, and he went to school to be an architect. Anyway, he decided that that wasn't for him, and he said one day that he'd like to join me on the farm. So he did. We took some trips out to New York State and it really kind of stimulated our thinking on the approach to dairy farming. We attended a number of courses together. We started thinking differently about the farm and how it functioned. We've grown the business through Lincoln's drive, really. And today we milk over four hundred cows. We started thinking of it as we need to be labor efficient and systems efficient. So we've really developed a herd where we're labor efficient – minimum labor, trying to do as much as we can through efficient layouts of the facilities and efficient use of employees' time and adapting technology, with our handling and milking equipment, etc. The herd has grown considerably. When I bought the farm this was a hundred and eighty some-odd acres, and I owned about a hundred and ten already. Since then we've grown it to now we own eight hundred acres, and we rent a substantial amount of land. So we're cropping a lot of land now.

LC: Do you think the farm might continue to get bigger?

RC: You know there are obviously limitations in Connecticut. The land base, there's a lot of competition from other uses: housing, etc. So it's not easy to add land. But there are opportunities out there. Like I said, when I moved to town there were thirty-five active dairy farms. Today – I'd have to count them up – there are no more than four or five. But here at Graywall, we're operating – I'd have to do some math here – but we're operating land that was a dairy farm when I moved to town. So we're taking over agriculture land that was producing milk. We've moved where the cows are, but we're still farming the land. So there is opportunity to acquire that land, but you're in competition with other options for the landowner. The option might be to sell it for

development. But a lot of the generation that farmed it, they did it because they loved it for the most part, and they want to see their land stay in agriculture. But as the generations change, that tie to the land starts to evaporate, so there are challenges making those arrangements as you move along. But there is opportunity to grow the land base.

There's also opportunity to grow – this is why we do The Farmer's Cow. We got together because we recognized that here we are in the midst of one of the largest consumer markets in the world, but as dairy farmers we're taking absolutely no advantage of it. As a dairy farm, we were producing a faceless product. The tanker would come to the farm, pick up the milk, and it would leave. You could never specifically say where that milk was going to. We had a group called Very Alive, and we still have that group. It's a group of farmers that got together because we wanted to promote the positive attributes of agriculture in Connecticut. A lot of people felt that agriculture was in demise, and it certainly is changing; but there's a whole set of farmers -- not just dairy farmers but growing vegetables and other crops or livestock -- that are investing in their business and want to be here for the future. So it's a definite evolution. But we want to put the positive spin that agriculture has a positive place in Connecticut. That's why we came up with the name "Very Alive," because we thought we were very alive. Anyway, that group got together in the mid 1990s. And out of that evolved... We felt strongly about farmland preservation. Farmland preservation was important to all of our farms, not at the current level but in future generations. And it can be an important tool to pass the farm on. It can be an important tool; in our case it allowed us to get into business, and it's also allowed us to expand our land base as we've been able to buy some farms that were already either entered [in] the program or that we put into the program. Of our eight hundred acres, six hundred are protected by Connecticut's Farmland Preservation Program. That's a wonderful thing. It's good for us because it allowed us to acquire the land, but it's good for future generations because that land will be in production. So anyway, there's opportunity, we feel, to expand our businesses in a different way. Vertically, I guess you could call it. In our case we chose to get together and form The Farmer's Cow, the six members that got together for The Farmer's Cow. And that's about finding other opportunities to market our product, to make our businesses economically viable. For current operations and as other family members want to enter the business, it presents a potential opportunity.

LC: Your position now is Manager of The Farmer's Cow as well as this farm?

RC: I am the managing member of The Farmer's Cow, and it's a full time plus job. So that's where I'm putting my efforts. Lincoln manages Graywall Farm. So he's responsible for the day-to-day and the future operations of the farm. We have a good dialogue; we talk a lot. And sometimes I think we have too big -- our visions our pretty big. [Laughs] But we get along well, and we look to the future and we see a lot of opportunity in a lot of different directions. (You have to tone this down a little bit.) But it's exciting. It's an exciting business, and we enjoy it. So Lincoln is operating the farm. My son-in-law David [Hevner] has joined us on the farm; it's been a few years now. And he's really into the operations of the farm. He takes care of the young stock

and a lot of the mechanical aspects of it. So it's a family operation here. And Lincoln and David – it's a good team to keep the farm progressing. And it is, even in these challenging economic times.

LC: So in a typical day, what kind of Farmer's Cow management things come up for you? Or a typical week?

RC: That's an interesting question. There's a lot to marketing milk. I have a staff now of two people. We just added another one; up to this point we had one. But now we have two people in sales positions on the road. So it's all about servicing our customers, building new customers, making sure that the production is in place, making sure that the distribution is being handled properly, taking care of consumer issues, taking care of customer issues, promoting the business, promoting the milk, directing advertising and media campaigns, and everyday customer relations. So it's the total operations of the business. It's everything from making sure we have enough milk being bottled up to taking care of production challenges and developing new opportunities. It's about maintaining the business and growing the business.

LC: Before The Farmer's Cow, would this have all been handled for you by a distributor?

RC: Right. We would sell our milk. We all belong to a co-op, Agrimark. Our milk gets sold to the co-op, and the co-op would find a home for the milk. And that home might be anywhere. It could be Hood, it could be ice cream, it could be cheese. We didn't worry about it. Now we put our spin on it, it's our label, so now we're responsible. A lot of time went into developing the name, the brand, the packaging. We had a vision; we didn't necessarily know exactly what we wanted, but we knew the kind of message that we wanted to get out. It took a few years to develop all that. We did launch the product in 2004, The Farmer's Cow. We've been growing it since. That's what I've been doing. We have a lot of good support staff. We have good marketing advisors, public relations people. We've really developed some good relationships with some graphic artists. So it's putting a team together, really.

LC: Talking a little bit about politics, you've been involved in lobbying for farm friendly legislation?

RC: Yes.

LC: When did you start to get involved with that?

RC: Well it really started with farmland preservation. I felt that the program was very important for the future of agriculture in Connecticut, and for what I valued particularly eastern Connecticut to be. I moved to Lebanon because I valued the rural atmosphere of Lebanon, and you could see it eroding. When the Farmland Preservation Program came along I saw it as an important tool to try and put some – in my mind – sanity to it all, and to try not to squander important resources and landscapes that make our state so special and add to the quality of life of everybody. So lobbying for farmland

preservation funding was key. And I got more interested in it, it became more important as I purchased this farm and went through the procedures of getting this farm preserved. Then I had some other property. There was a piece of land down the road; it's actually where Lincoln lives now. The previous owners there were elderly bachelors. They'd started the process of putting their land into the Farmland Preservation Program, and then one of them passed away. I was able to purchase it from the estate and proceed with the application. But the governor at the time was very anti-farmland preservation. The funding of the program had waned very low. So that really stimulated our efforts. That's how we got together for Very Alive; it was behind this lobbying for funding for farmland preservation.

So we held tours of our farms. We invited legislators. We did a real good one in 1999. We organized a tour called "Back Road '99." We hired a couple of buses -- big coaches -- and we invited legislators and others that we felt were key policy makers that could make a difference in the Farmland Preservation Program. And we went on a tour around Lebanon and Franklin. It was only a ten-mile radius; but even to us as dairy farmers, the members of Very Alive, we were quite surprised at the variety of agriculture and the number of jobs that were involved in agriculture. We started counting up the number of jobs. At that time the mushroom farm [in Franklin, Conn.] was in business. We had I think it was over twelve hundred jobs in this ten-mile radius. It was a shocker. Anyway, so then you start realizing the economic impact of agriculture. It's not just on our farms. The jobs that are created and all the environmental benefits, etc. So we held these tours to point out the variety of agriculture, the economic benefits of agriculture, the environmental benefits of agriculture. And we started lobbying. And we achieved some success over the years. Out of that other groups have grown, not necessarily out of our group but out of the time. There's the Working Lands Alliance, and some of us have been instrumental in the startup of that. Out of that came the Connecticut Farmland Trust, of which I'm a director. It's really been a lot of heightened awareness by the consumer and by the legislators.

Recently we lobbied for a program to maintain particularly dairy farms' viability. This year has been a very, very challenging year economically. Extremely challenging. And we were able to lobby and get funding, which is miraculous in this economic environment. But I have to say the state legislators stepped up to the plate, and the whole legislative body actually. But it was key to the survival of our farms. And if that legislation hadn't been passed, there would be a serious exodus of dairy farms in Connecticut. And we're already at a very low level. So what we've been able to build up over the years in lobbying and educating and promoting is coming together in a lot of different aspects. Lebanon has the highest amount of preserved land in the state of Connecticut, over 4,000 acres. And there's about 11,000 acres of tillable soil in Lebanon. That's quite an accomplishment.

LC: Other than land use, are there also laws and policies in other areas that you need to lobby on – taxes, pricing, credit?

RC: Oh, there are a lot of aspects of governance that the governing bodies, I guess you'd say, need to understand what the impact is on agriculture, what the challenges of agriculture are. It's a changing world, and we in the business of agriculture need to be proactive. We need to be considerate of our neighbors, considerate of the environment and to farm in a manner that protects all those levels. But at the same time when you're farming, you're farming with nature. And you can't always predict what's going to happen. Nature can throw some real curves at you. Every year is a challenge. It can be too wet, it can be too dry, it can rain at the wrong time – the challenges of cropping and harvesting, etc. Those activities can have an impact in a neighborhood, for instance. Everybody needs to understand what the challenges are and come up with good solutions.

LC: And that's part of what the lobbying is, to inform people?

RC: Informative, yes.

LC: Pricing milk is complicated, I've come to see. What impacts the costs of production and the prices you're getting?

RC: Well the pricing of milk... The price of the dairy farm is set on the national level, and the national level is influenced by worldwide markets. So it's not necessarily what goes on in Connecticut that influences the price you receive for your milk. If exports, for instance, should dry up because of a change in the value of the dollar, or whatever political reasons, if the exports are not being exported, it can affect the price that we receive on the farm for milk. The price of milk is set on a national stage; it does not recognize regional differences in costs of production. [In] the northeast – Connecticut and the New England states and New York – typically we have higher costs of production than other parts of the country, when you get to the Midwest or the far west. So our costs of production are higher. There isn't any accounting for that in the national pricing of milk. So that's a challenge.

LC: Would they ever go to regional pricing, do you think?

RC: They have had attempts at that. They had a Northeast Dairy Compact a number of years ago, which kicked in a price leveler when the price of milk fell below certain cost of production in the northeast, but that succumbed to pressure from other parts of the country. They didn't care to see the northeast get that. So that was politically motivated that it didn't get reenacted through Congress. That was a good program. It worked. There are regional differences. There needs to be a national policy that recognizes those regional differences. Milk pricing is very complex. It's extremely complex, and I don't even begin to understand it.

LC: Is it going to change on the federal level any time soon?

RC: I think, you know, it's a slow process. I think there's a recognition that something needs to be done. There's definitely that. And local legislators do recognize that, so I think there's a raised awareness of it. But it's going to take time.

LC: How do you deal with the costs of production and try to keep those down?

RC: [Pause] We try to buy our inputs economically. We try to develop labor efficiencies. You work to harvest good crops so you can grow more of your inputs. If you can grow crops that are high in protein and energy that means the less inputs you have to purchase in to balance the ration. It's all levels of trying to maintain efficiencies. By the same token, in dairy in particular, you can't shut down. You can't tell the cows to go home for a couple of weeks. So if you're in the dairy business, you're in it. The costs of producing milk don't go away. You try and be as efficient as possible, and not make capital expenditures and all those things that you would reasonably think you could do, but that goes so far. In the case of this particular year of severe, severe financial challenges, we at Graywall had to refinance. Borrow money to keep going, basically. And you can only do that so many times. But like I say you've got to keep running, keep operating. It's a challenge to keep the business going.

LC: What would you say are some of the biggest changes from the time you started this farm to now in the way you operate or the environment you operate in?

RC: [Pause] That's an interesting question. I think one of the biggest changes is my mindset. When I first started, for instance, I was a purist I guess. I felt I needed to have purebred cows. I liked good looking cows. I still do. And our cows are good looking. But I had this thing in my head about purebred animals. A cow needed to be black and white or brown. We had Brown Swiss and we had Holsteins. But in the herd – this is an example – when I purchased it we had some crossbreds. They were crossbreds between Holsteins and Swiss. They were a muddy color. I said, "What do I want those for? I want purebreds." And I sold those animals. That was one of the biggest mistakes I made, because I soon realized that some of those crossbreds were the best producing animals we had. So it's more of a business sense. Rather than being an idealist, I started really looking at the farm from a business point of view. I used to like to walk into the barn and see sawdust in the stalls. I loved the smell of fresh sawdust. Today we bed with manure and chopped hay. The cows are healthy. It's an economic, practical, recycling type decision. So I'm not as idealistic as I used to be; I'm more practical, and thinking about how the farm needs to operate [for] economical viability and efficiency. Learning those lessons as I moved ahead was probably the biggest change personally, from the "idealistic" way things should be. You develop a full appreciation of what it takes to operate a farm and those involved. Not being brought up in agriculture I had to learn that quickly on my own. It was valuable lessons, and change of mind.

LC: Do you think the farmers that you learned from when you were a boy, did you get that sort of idealistic view from them, or were they also concentrating on the business?

RC: Oh they were concentrating on the business. Well, that particular farm in Canada, that was certainly an idealistic place. They were well off; it was a show place. My exposure to farms around here – they were all practical, hard working farms. But then you know there are different kinds of farms. Some farmers did a lot with registering and showing animals. That part didn't really interest me; it was just the fact that I really liked good looking cows. Anyway, that was an evolution for me.

LC: Have there been technology changes in the twenty years?

RC: Yes, well we've certainly changed the way we do things here. There used to be a lot more hand labor here. Things evolve. At a point in time new technology, new thinking comes along. For instance the barn we're in – we still use the barn – was ahead of its time. It was a nice barn. But systems-wise, the systems have changed. For instance the manure went into a picket dam system. A picket dam system lets the water part of the manure just flow through this picket dam and into a grassy area where it was filtered out. Well, you can't do that any more, because that eventually ended up in the wetland. So we've implemented a lot of manure handling technology here. That's probably the biggest change is the manure. We spend as much time handling manure as we do milking cows. The cows produce a lot of poop. So we've implemented technology here. This was kind of out of Lincoln's and my travels to other farms in New York; we were exposed to separators, where basically you squeeze the manure and you separate the liquids from the solids. So we installed one of those, probably a good fifteen years ago now. We did that pretty quick. So that was a turning point because it really set up systems for our manure handling. We have storage, and we have equipment to spread our manure. That has really evolved. We used to haul everything with a manure spreader, and now it's with tankers. We transport manure from the farm to the field and then offload it into equipment that spreads the manure in the field. We've adapted equipment to incorporate the manure directly into the soil. Our harvesting techniques have changed. There's a lot of emphasis on harvesting our crops at the optimum nutrient levels of protein, etc., so we're really pushing to get the crops in at the right time. We've actually subcontracted a lot of that now. We hire custom operators to come in and harvest our crops so we can get them done in a narrower window of opportunity so we can have those quality crops. So cropping, and then the barns...

We've built new barns with an emphasis on cow comfort. That was a big evolution. The barns are airy and comfortable and well ventilated, with an emphasis on keeping the cows cool. What I learned early in the game is that you can't take milk from a cow, she gives it. And she only gives it when she's happy and content. You've got to keep that in your head all the time, because that's what it's all about, is keeping the cows happy. So from a cow handling point of view, it's little things. It's about stress, it's about allowing the cow having enough time to do her own thing, so you're not messing with her all the time, you're not interfering with her day. She just wants to be left alone and lie down and chew her cud, so you have to create an environment where she can do that. We built a new milking facility, and the emphasis there is to get the cows in and back to the barn quickly. When we started we milked two times a day, now we milk

three times a day; and that's all about cow comfort. To milk her out more frequently, she's more comfortable; she's not carrying a lot of weight around in her udder. Those are all evolutions in how we do things and how we handle our cows.

For instance we put alley scrapers in our barn to scrape the manure. Not only does it keep the barn a lot cleaner, but the alley scraper means we don't have to go into that barn with a piece of equipment to scrape the barn. So that's one less time we've disturbed the cow. So it's those kinds of things. A lot of things have changed in how we handle things, how we do things. It makes for a productive, efficient operation. That's what we're striving to create here.

LC: It keeps changing probably.

RC: Right. It does.

LC: A general question: how would you describe the health of the dairy industry in Connecticut, or the direction it's going?

RC: [Pause] The dairy industry has definitely experienced some very challenging times. This past year, 2009, has been absolutely horrible economically. It's taken its toll. There are a lot of changes. The number of farms has certainly been reducing. But [by] the same token there's a real opportunity for agriculture and for dairy farming I believe. In the case of the Farmer's Cow we're really at the right point; we came out with the product at the right point in time. Because there's a growing interest in knowing where your food comes from and an appreciation of being able to visit the farm that produced the milk, in the case of dairy. When you look at the growth of farmers' markets across the state, there's been a huge growth. When you look at the emphasis in the supermarkets, you've got national chains that are putting emphasis on locally grown. That all offers opportunity. And here we are in Connecticut; we're in the market between Boston and New York City, and [there's] a good population base right at our doorstep right here in Connecticut. There's a lot of opportunity to take advantage of that market, with not only milk but with other dairy products. The business is changing, but there's opportunity.

It's interesting. You actually can see a number of smaller farms coming back into business. There's a cheese maker not far from here over in Colchester. They have, I don't know, probably thirty cows maybe, but they're producing cheese that they're marketing in New York City at a premium price. There's opportunity.

LC: And even for small operations?

RC: There's opportunity for small, and there's opportunity for larger.

LC: The Farmer's Cow is now selling more than just dairy products. Will that continue do you think? Is that a trend?

RC: I think there's a real opportunity. The Farmer's Cow has been wonderful; it's really worked out very well. It's wonderful how well the brand is recognized across the whole state of Connecticut. It's amazing. But there's a whole bunch of people out there who still don't know about us, so there's a lot of opportunity too. But The Farmer's Cow has brand recognition, which is really quite an accomplishment. That goes to the whole concept, the packaging and the timing; it's just worked very well. And we were very fortunate to get some major supermarkets take our milk on early in the game; and we've been able to grow with them, and grow with the independents, and we're growing into food service and restaurants and coffee shops, so there's a lot of different opportunities.

Early on there was a produce buyer at a large supermarket; he liked what we were doing, and he wanted to know if we could do apple cider. Well as members, we didn't have an apple tree between us. But we worked out an arrangement with a local orchard to supply us with cider, which got bottled at another small bottling operation. Here we expanded the brand; from milk we'd gone to cider. And it was because of an appreciation of the brand and recognition of it as local products. So that evolved. We grew that. Then they wanted to know if we could do summer beverages, you know, lemonade. We get some giggles from people; you know, "I'd like to see the cow that produces this lemonade." But it's done quite well. And what's neat about it is now not only is the Farmer's Cow brand in the dairy section, now The Farmer's Cow brand is showing up in the produce section. So you're getting more recognition through the store. Then out of that evolved eggs. We were able to work out an arrangement with some local egg farms, and now we have the Farmer's Cow eggs. We have cow eggs. [Laughter] We get consumers send us e-mails about that. They get a big chuckle; these are cow eggs. So it's really evolved in a really neat way, to see the brand recognition. Now we're a benefit to not only just our dairy farms, but we're benefiting orchards, we're benefiting egg farms. And we're bringing these products to the consumer that are local products. That's evolved. That wasn't in our game plan. When we set out, if anybody said we were going to be selling apple cider and eggs, we'd have said, you know... And now we're evolving into other dairy products, the heavy cream; and we're going to be doing ice cream in the spring.

LC: And that will continue to expand, do you think?

RC: Yes. I think it's a lot of opportunity.

LC: How do you envision this farm in the next, say, fifty years? What will it look like?

RC: [Laughs, Pause] I think we'll be paying more attention to energy efficiency, to growing more and more of our own inputs, I think, here that meet certain criteria. I'd like to see us evolve into more self sufficiency. I think a lot of emphasis is going to be going on satisfying the consumer market – growing crops and creating products that satisfy that market. I personally can see a little bit more diversity. For instance here I think we'll be looking at raising some pasture raised beef, for instance. That's an item that we feel on this farm there's a growing interest in. People really want to trust, and they need to

trust, the farmers and how we do things. So that's an opportunity for us as farmers to provide the products that the consumer is looking for. I think that's an opportunity for the future.

LC: To diversify some?

RC: Right. To really concentrate on producing products that satisfy... There's a lot of opportunity there. Like I point out, with the beef part of it. I'm not sure. It could be... On this farm we have a lot of steep hillsides that you can't crop that well but that used to be good pasture and could be renovated to good pasture. We could be providing a product that has a market.

LC: Anything else you'd like to add, or that we haven't covered well enough?

RC: I don't know; you've covered quite a bit of stuff. [Pause] No, I think as challenging as agriculture is, it's a rewarding business. It's very rewarding in the case of The Farmer's Cow. It gives us the opportunity to have the public come to our farms. And it's very rewarding to see the enthusiasm of the public for not only The Farmer's Cow but for agriculture. They really appreciate it. They really get excited about coming to the farm. Old and young, they come and they see... How many opportunities do people have to actually see a cow, and to have that cow stick its tongue out at them? You know what I mean? That enthusiasm... I go to give presentations, and you're almost like elevated to a... Somebody told me you're like a rock star. [Laughter] Not that extreme, but there's a huge interest and a respect for agriculture and for what we do. To me that's very rewarding. And it also shows that we are providing to society something that they value. And that means a lot.

LC: That's a great ending. Thank you.

[End of Interview]