WS: Do we have your permission to record?

KM: Yes, you do.

WS: Okay. Okay. When did you start farming or what brought you into farming?

KM: I grew up on the farm that Mom and Dad started, and just kinda started probably as soon as I was old enough to do chores, I guess--

AV: Mmhmm.

KM: Probably eight or ten I started workin'.

AV: What kind of chores did you do?

KM: Takin' care of the young stock and just helping wherever.

WS: Are there any differences between the farm now than when you were younger?

KM: It's the cows. The dairy portion has probably doubled in size since I was younger. The land-base is probably the same size. Just cow numbers and production have increased fairly significantly.

WS: How many acres do you have?

KM: Roughly eight hundred farming. Total.

AV: Do you own all those acres or are some of them rented?

KM: About half and half.
AV: Okay.

KM: Four hundred owned, four hundred rented.

WS: What generation is the farm?

KM: Third.

AV: And mainly dairy…that’s all you do?

KM: Dairy, yes, right.

WS: When you, when you were younger, like, what were the roles of your family members in farming? Like, did they have outside, other jobs or was it…?

KM: Not, not, uh, really. Pretty much. What other family members are you?

AV: Is the parents we just met, is that--

KM: They, they started out, and pretty much as the kids grew up, they all worked 'em on the farm.

AV: Mmhmm.

KM: Once they graduated high school, they either went on and done something else or, uh, I have an older brother who is also involved in the farm some and myself and we stayed at the farm and just continued to work at the farm.

AV: Okay. Has this been viewed as more of a business for you or a lifestyle choice?

KM: Probably a lifestyle choice. I mean, there’s still, it still carries a business sense to it--

AV: Mmhmm.

KM: But it's still a lifestyle I wanted to live and raise my family.

AV: Yeah.

WS: Presently, is this your sole source of income or do you, like, does your wife work also?

KM: My wife works off the farm.

AV: Okay. And you have two kids?
KM: Just one.

AV: Just one, okay. Is that the little boy we saw earlier?

KM: Yup.

AV: Okay, can you describe a typical day on the farm?

KM: Start at 4 a.m.--

AV: Oh my gosh.

KM: Go out and milk cows 'til 8, 8:30. My brother normally comes in and feeds cows, uh, scrape. Do various odds and ends, treating sick cows, whatever health care needs to be done in the morning, and at like 11:30, they'll start milking again. And just, I mean, various maintenance things that need done or other field operations. Normally we try… In the winter, I don't like to work more than twelve hours. Summer, it's whatever is required--

AV: Yeah, whatever needs to…How many cows do you have?

KM: Milk about two hundred and sixty.

AV: Two hundred sixty.

WS: And what breeds do you have?

KM: Holsteins and Brown Swiss.

AV: What is the most satisfying part of farming to you? What do you love to do the most?

KM: We’ve…since I've become actively, very active in the dairy, started breeding cows for show and them cows go on and do very well at the national shows. It's pretty gratifying to see them compete.

AV: So you raise these from young…?

KM: Correct.

WS: Oh, cool. Now, what kinds of shows do they show in? Like, is this including county fairs also, or?

KM: Not so much county fairs. State fair and then national shows at, in Wisconsin.

AV: Your father said you went to Australia?
KM: Yeah.

AV: For…?

KM: That was probably, ten, maybe not quite ten years ago.

AV: Oh, okay.

KM: Went over there for a show. We didn't take anything, we just--I went over with some friends of mine that go over about every year--

AV: Oh, okay.

KM: And they work at the show. And [unclear] cattle.

WS: Do you have a preference between the breeds that you like the best?

KM: The Brown Swiss.

WS: Okay.

AV: Why would you say that?

KM: They're temperament is just, they're really docile. Just kinda, I don’t know, just like having a big pet outside.

[All laugh]

AV: Yeah. Is it about half and half? Or do you have more?

KM: No, there’s probably only maybe twenty Brown Swiss mature cows and then the remainder would be Holsteins.

WS: What is the hardest part of farming for you?

KM: Oh, the hardest part would probably be just, I don’t know, some of the struggles. Whether it's economics or whether it's the good cow that you bred that's down and not responding to treatment, or...there's just a lot of different things that really tug on ya at various times--

WS: Mmhmm.

KM: and the weather…it's, it's all…

WS: Yeah. When do they calve? How is your…how is that set up?
KM: They--we--normally they calve at two years, close to two years of age.

WS: Mmhmm. And what time of the year, is it like just--

KM: Continual.

WS: Okay. I was just curious.

KM: Yeah.

WS: Do you have a preference for what time of year, like trying--

KM: [Laughs] Not this time!

AV: Yeah...

KM: I don't like pullin' calves--

WS: Yeah, I just--

KM: I mean, they, they calve and it’s not a big deal most of 'em. Eight-five percent of the cows will calve on their own and not even need any prob, er, need any help. Some of the cows don't require much help at all. [Unclear]

WS: I live on a small farm, so I was just curious, because we often times have them during winter and it’s kinda tough to do it, so…[Laughs]

KM: Yeah, it's not...I meant it's…we've got a room set up down there with heat. And if the wet ones--you know, when it's really cold, they just [unclear] right in there, so that they can just maintain their body temperature and stuff.

AV: Are there any changes or improvements you would like to make on your farm in the future?

KM: Oh, I don't know. I guess if…hopefully someday, I can just have pretty much a herd of Brown Swiss cows here, I think is kinda where I’ve--

AV: Are the Holsteins more profitable or you just like the combination?

KM: No, the Holsteins were here, and I bought--

AV: Oh, right, okay.

KM: Bought a fair number of Holsteins [unclear]. But to buy the Brown Swiss that I would want, it's just not feasible just to liquidate the Holsteins and then…
AV: Mmhmm.

KM: So I just have to build--

AV: Work towards it.

KM: From breeding. We do some embryo transfer at work, that we put them eggs in the Holstein, so they carry a Brown Swiss calf.

WS: In general, what are some advancements in farming you've seen? Like, positive advancements?

KM: Um, the--a lot of the genetics in the, in the seed has been…I mean, it's made a tremendous difference in yield potential. And there’s, there's a lot of stuff genetic wise in the dairy. The bull--how they're testing bulls that's going to make it a big difference down the road. I can see that as a big advantage right now.

WS: Have you ever considered getting out of farming?

KM: Mmm...No.

[All laugh]

WS: And on the other hand, do you know any farmers that were relatively large-scale that have gotten out of it?

KM: One, but I didn't know--I mean, I knew him to talk to him, but...

AV: You don't know his reasons?

KM: No. I mean…

AV: Okay. What do you feed cows mostly?

KM: The ration is basically corn silage, haylage, and then, we would have high-moisture corn and then a supplement that would have our minerals, protein, and any other additives that would go in like in a small quantity. That would all come as a mix, but the feed mill, they just mix all that together. High-moisture corn, corn silage, and haylage would all be home groan porridges from grain.

AV: What advice would you give someone that's interested in getting into farming?

KM: It's challenging. I mean, you've gotta be dedicated to it. If you can't, then...and if you can find a niche market for, I mean, stuff, that's definitely a big bonus. Marketing is a larger role than it was fifteen years ago.
WS: I noticed, like where I'm from, a lot of people are getting into goats and things. That's very popular right now. Have you ever considered getting into anything besides dairy?

KM: Mmm...Nah, I mean if I couldn't dairy, I'd probably just grain farm. Maybe even still fool around with a few show cattle.

WS: What is your outlook on the future of agriculture? Uh, be it locally or…?

KM: There's…it's ever changing. I mean there's challenges that come down constantly, and it's, it's always going to be tight, I think. It's not gonna be a place where you get wealthy fast, but I mean, the lifestyle, I can support my family and just be at peace livin' out of it.

WS: Okay, along the lines of, like, we're studying agro-ecology--what, um, what is your outlook on sustainable agriculture in general?

KM: As far as?

WS: It's different. A lot of the studies we did were more for the selling of crops.

KM: Like, like…

WS: And to that affect more than with animals--

KM: Like, like organic, or…?

WS: Yeah, yeah. Which, that's the term that's sort of you can take-it-as-you-will, so...

KM: I mean I…in my mind, there's good producers in both kinda the conventional or the organic or whatever, and there's bad producers in both. I don't know…I guess I just lean more towards being conventional and doing things with technology as they allow us to. I'm just not real comfortable I guess with that. With the organic stuff. It’s just, I don't know. Everybody's got their own opinion, so...

AV: Yeah, it's kinda a loose definition.

KM: Yeah.

WS: It's very…and, and I'm not meaning necessarily certified because personally, I don't really like the idea of the certification process or anything to that effect, but--

AV: [Unclear]

KM: Yeah. It's not. It's a little grey area there that's…
AV: Yeah.

WS: No. Yeah, exactly.

AV: What's your… Did I already ask that?

[Laugh]

KM: I can give you a different answer.

[All laugh]

AV: What is your outlook on the future of agricultural industry? Did I already ask that?

WS: I think so.

[All laugh]

AV: All right. Never mind.

WS: What about agriculture locally and, uh, do you feel that the community has a sense of agriculture or…?

KM: Somewhat, but it seems like every generation gets a further… I think in my mind, two or three generations ago, grandparents or an aunt or an uncle always had a farm. And they would always kinda go back to that for a holiday or something and they kinda got removed from that and kinda lost touch with that a little bit now. I… that's kinda part of my fear. Locally, I think we have a fairly good infrastructure of agriculture in general in this county and surrounding counties that kinda maybe gave us a little advantage versus some of the other areas.

AV: So where does, the… I'm [unclear]… the milk you produce, where does that go?

KM: We send our milk to… it's a handler… and then they… it'll go to… it goes to a variety of different places, depending on who needs milk. [Yawns] Excuse me. It'll either go to Smith Dairy in Orville or Superior Dairy in Canton or Brewster Cheese.

AV: Okay, so it, it is local?

KM: It stays local.

AV: Okay.

KM: I mean, they kinda keep it in a thirty or thirty-five mile radius. There's a lot of process around, but at some point, they just shift it a little bit--
AV: Yeah, wherever it's needed.

KM: Wherever it needs to be. Who's paying them the most, whatever.

[All laugh]

AV: Right. In terms of taste, visual appeal, would you say the overall quality of food in the U.S. has increased, decreased, or stayed the same?

KM: Visually, I think it stayed the same. I think there is some…I think that some of the beef has done some marketing things, and I think it has actually affected the taste, I mean, positively. With like the certified Angus Beef program…I think they’ve done…trying to get the consumers a consistent product. I think that’s helped them. A little bit of a mixed bag, I guess, but…

AV: Okay.

KM: Positively too just staying flat for the most part.

WS: Maybe a slight bit more controversial--how do you feel about, like, the government being involved in agricultural processes?

KM: It seems like…I mean, we deal with the regulations on the dairy, and it seems like there's more and more things that have less and less effect on the quality of the milk, or…there's just a lot more regulations that kind of burden us. I mean, right now, I don’t know. It's probably going to get worse before it gets better.

WS: Is there anything about the farm that we haven't covered that you think is important for us to touch on?

AV: Or anything I don’t know…

WS: Or like…?

AV: Just like, interesting stories, or…?

WS: Yeah.

KM: Hmm. Yeah, I don’t know.

[All laugh]

KM: I just...

WS: Well, I feel like we covered it.
AV: Yeah me too. [Unclear] good.

WS: Thank you so much.

End of Interview