Carl Redick
Narrator

Morgan Greer
Lindsey Bowman
The College of Wooster
Interviewers

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at the Redick farm in Wooster, Ohio

Carl Redick - CR
Carla Redick - MR
Greer Morgan - GM
Lindsey Bowman - LB

LB: All right, today is, ah, December 4th, and we’re sitting here with, umm, Carl Redick, and his wife…

MR: Carla

LB: Carla, and, ah, we are going to ask him some questions about, ah, his role as a Wayne County farmer. And Greer Morgan is here as well…

LB/CR/MR: [laughter]

GM: With Lindsey Bowman.

LB: Yes. All right, so if you could just, maybe start, umm, by talking, when did you start farming?

CR: I started to farm, well when I graduated full time from high school in 1980, and then I’ve just always helped on the family farm since I was old enough to drive a tractor and, you know, pitch in and do whatever I could do.

LB: Yeah.

CR: Go ahead dear, when did you start farming?

CR/MR: [laughter]

MR: I don’t farm. I work outside the family home; I’m volunteer coordinator of the Wooster Community Hospital.

LB: How long has your family been farming then?
CR: Oh, this’ll…my son that’s outside; he’s probably the fourth generation. We, ah, we’ve been out on these farms since 19, I think 58, and before that, we owned, umm… Isn’t Wooster right across from the Country Club?

LB: Mhmm.

CR: Where umm, what is it… Morgan, Saunders, and all those streets and stuff…

MR: Miller Lakes.

CR: North of Wayne Avenue is where we, where my parents lived and stuff, or my grandparents, so.

GM: Okay, so it was before Wooster got developed.

CR: Yeah, yup.

LB: So, are there any differences on your farm now, than when you were a kid?

CR: Well there’s a lot of 'em, it’s just trying to think what they are.

LB: Yeah.

CR: As far as what do you mean? Go ahead and say it honey.

MR: I would say, I can answer that one.

CR: Better equipment, higher yield. I mean just…

MR: He has better equipment. In 1986, we got married and you have started upgrading equipment from there.

CR: Just, just technology in general, you know, is a big change. Stuff, so…

GM: Okay. Have you always grown the same crops, or…?

CR: Yeah: corn, soybeans, wheat, and hay.

GM: Okay, are there reasons for that? Just market, or…?

CR: The market. The best cash crops for this area and stuff, so…

LB: So what is the hardest part of farming for you?

MR: [whispers] I can answer that one. Mother Nature.
CR: My wife says Mother Nature, and that probably is it. Cause you have no control over what needs to be done at certain times of year, and stuff…so… Just speak up dear, don’t whisper.

LB/GM/MG: [laughter]

LB: What’s the most satisfying and fulfilling part of farming for you guys?

CR: I just like watching the crops grow. Plantin' it and then watching it grow throughout the summer, and stuff. We just…my parent, well you know my parents live down the road, and just going back and forth and the changes you see from day to day, you know, during the summer. I think that’s probably the most rewarding. Even in a bad year, you know you gave it your best shot and it was just out of our hands, you know, what for yields we get and stuff, so.

GM: Has this year been hard for you since it’s been so wet?

CR: It started out very hard, it ended up very well. We had very good crops and the prices were real good. So kind of an extreme, we weren’t expecting, in the spring we weren’t expecting anything near what we got in the fall, so it worked out really well.

MR: And it was a learning experience also. Knowing that you could change your seeds to a different maturity level and still do well.

CR: And still get a good yield.

MR: And that’s a learning experience, so there is something learned.

CR: Mmhmm.

LB: What conditions affect the yield the most, like what drives…?

CR: Too much rain, not enough rain, and too much heat. I mean, usually if it’s cool, you’ll still get a good yield, if you have moisture, it just won’t dry down, it costs you more to harvest it, and stuff. But probably the rain, you know, like I say, too much or too little are probably the two biggest things. Cause if you have enough, if you have enough rain even with heat, that’s good because it’ll, it allows your crop to mature, and, you know, then it doesn’t cost you as much money to dry it down in the fall, so, probably just rain in general, you know, is the big thing. One, either way…

MG: How large is your farm?

CR: Ah, we farm about eighteen hundred acres.

GM: Okay. Do you own all of that or do you rent some?
CR: No. We um… My parents and my wife and I own not quite five hundred acres here. Then my Dad’s brother, and I farm with my two cousins, over, they have 360 acres over there, and then my cousins and I own about forty acres in another place. So probably about half and half we own and then rent, the bounds and stuff, so…

GM: Okay.

LB: Could you describe your typical day? And maybe, like, one that starts…

CR: Well don’t ask my wife.

LB/CR/GM: [laughter]

CR: It starts with watching “Married with Children” in the morning at 5:30.

MR/LB/GM/CR: [laughter]

CR: And that’s the truth, even though she doesn’t want to…

GM: There’s nothing wrong with that.

CR: It just depends on the time of year.

LB: Yeah.

CR: Which I mean, in the spring and the fall we start, you know, fairly early, and like now, we don’t, we didn’t put any cattle in the feed. We have a few, my boy, one boy, has a few steers, but like now I, more like a factory job, you know, eight to five or whatever, and stuff, and then some days you work longer or shorter. But you know, like I say in the spring it’s, you know you may work till ten, eleven at night and the same in the fall. Like in the fall, I just got done drying corn and I’d go down at eleven, or two or three in the morning and fill the dryer to keep things going. You know, but that’s just for three weeks or a month, you know, outta the year, outta the fall. That’s not all year round or anything, so, we get our forty hours a week in, let’s put it that way, even though my wife doesn’t think so sometimes.

LB: What is the drying process that you described?

CR: We umm, we have a couple grain bins down at my dad’s and one has a floor up above that you put fifteen hundred bushels of wet crops in. And it has two big furnaces underneath and it forces the heat up through it and dries it down from twenty to twenty-five percent moisture down to an acceptable level for the feed mills, which is normally fourteen to fifteen percent. And you just keep filling it. Like it, this year it’d take four to five hours so I’d put fifteen hundred bushel in, it would dry out, then I’d drop them to the bottom of the bin, and then put another fifteen hundred bushel in and you just kind of continue a cycle. Like this year, I think I filled it eighty-six times.
LB: Wow, my gosh.

CR: I think. Somthin’ like that, you know, and stuff. So, it takes, it takes a while.

LB: And is that with the corn, or…?

CR: Yeah, corn, yup. Soybeans normally dry down on their own. We don’t usually mess with drying ’em. You can get ’em, Mother Nature gets ’em close to being dry, that um, we don’t have to, you know, do too much with, it’s easier to take a little bit of a discount on ‘em than it is to dry ’em down cause you get ’em too dry then that effects, you get ’em to dry they don’t weight as much so therefore your yield goes down, you know, so you just kind of try and blend them in and let mother nature do that for you, so…

LB: So when you have the corn in the field. Are you hoping that it’s at a good moisture content so you don’t have to mess around with it too much?

CR: Your hope, you like your hope, last year we had a lot of corn we didn’t even need to dry in 2010. This year when we started it was like 28% moisture, when we finished it was down to about 20%, which 20% is pretty good, you know, twenty-eight is not good cause it takes…

MR: Use the comparison from last year then, cause it would be seventeen or eighteen last year.

CR: Let me think.

MR: It would be down to four…

CR: Last year we used, I don’t have my gallon. Last year we used like--

MR: Propane, that’s what we’re talking about.

CR: --fourteen, no, fourteen thousand dollars’ worth of propane, maybe, last year, maybe a little bit more than that, and the year before we used like fifty-six thousand because the corn never dried down.

GM: Oh my gosh.

CR: You know, and stuff…

LB: Wow.

CR: And there, that effects your, you know, end of year, and stuff.

MR: Cost.
CR: So, like I say, that’s why it’s nice to have Mother Nature on your side most of the time, so.

LB: Yeah.

GM: Are there specific ways that you deal with weeds and insect pests in your fields?

CR: Weeds, we do, we spray, we are not an organic farm, you know, we have chemicals we use. And some of the new varieties of corn has a, uh, insect protection on it, that, you know... But you can only use so much of that, you’re not allowed to use, put your whole crop out, you have to give the insects a chance. It’s called a refuge corn. That stuff you can either buy it right already mixed in the bag with the rest of it. Or you can just plant separate fields to different things. But yeah, we do, like I said, we use chemicals and, and then protection on some of the seed and stuff, so.

LB: So, describe what the purpose of the refuge corn is.

CR: Just, ah, so we don’t totally eliminate the bugs, you know, it’s kinda like, Mother Nature has its way of eliminating some bugs too. You know like one creature will eat another, well the corn is, you know, the, I don’t know how to say it...

MR: You need some insects.

CR: The EPA, and everybody, you know, you want to protect, you don’t want to eliminate all the, all the pests cause they do have some other good purposes and stuff, but using this, these varieties of corn, most of the time it eliminates us having to come back in and spray for bugs later on. It’s just kind of like an insurance policy up front.

MR: And one nice thing is that’s done, a lot of that’s done, locally with the OARDC. They’re actually doing all that testing [unclear].

CR: Testing out at the research center and stuff, not all of it, I mean each seed company is different, but there’s a lot of research done out at the research center at Wooster.

LB: How do you choose which seed companies, like, to purchase from? How does that work?

CR: We, this year we used four different seed corn companies. We’ve, basically buy performance, but we have some neighbors and things that sell some seeds and we buy a little bit off of them just to keep peace, you know, and stuff. [laughter] But we, we, our big one is Pioneer Hybrids and stuff, and we’ve just grown ‘em for years cause they’ve always done good for us. But, like I say, we try and work with the neighbors a little bit too, and stuff. But if it doesn’t produce, we’re not gonna to buy it, you know. It has to be a good product or we’re not going to buy it just cause, you know, they’re our neighbors and stuff, so…
GM: Do you feel like you’re part of a farming community?

CR: Oh yeah, yup. If somebody needs something out here, we all just pitch in and help each other and stuff, so…

GM: Okay, could you describe that a little bit? It’s really different from where I’ve grown up in the suburbs.

CR: Well, uh, I mean, like, when we finished the other day, so we offered our equipment to two or three neighbors who weren’t quite done yet, and in years past the roles have been reversed. They’ve been done and we weren’t and we borrowed wagons and trucks and, you know. Like my, even this year, my, oh Scotty, my nephew and brother-in-law, we weren’t done and so they brought a truck over for us. I mean you just work back and forth and you do to help somebody to get the crops, you know.

MR: Without expecting something in return.

CR: Yeah, without, I mean. I mean way everybody tries to always make it right, but you don’t do it for the money part of it, you do it just so everybody can get their crops in, in the field and out of the field and stuff, so...

LB: Do you know anyone who’s given up farming and, like, why their reasons for doing that would be?

MR: I would say several years ago it was very hard field to -- unless you were established -- to be in, and lost a lot of good people because it was just, it got unaffordable.

CR: Yeah, financially a few years ago, prices were way down and back then, there wasn’t a lot of… now people take crop insurance out, just like on your automobile or your house, and they kind of get price protection with that and back then it wasn’t as common and even if you have two or three bad years in a row, it hits you in the pocketbook pretty hard, and stuff so…

MR: And you don’t have financial institutions that will help you.

CR: And yeah…

MR: Because, once after having so many bad years, you’re a risk to them, so it is, it’s a, it’s a stressful, times were very stressful.

CR: I mean, more and more crop insurance plays a bigger part in a… you know, in farming and stuff, so…

GM: Okay, how do subsidies factor in?
CR: Excuse me?

GM: How do subsidies from the government factor in?

CR: They used to be very big when the prices were down. But now that things have turned around, prices are up. I mean that’s just a very small part of our, our income. Before it used to be, I mean, it didn’t matter if you were dairy, you know, hogs, or whatever, I mean farm subsidies were a very big part, but it, like I say things have changed, and it’s, I’d say we’re down to, ah… like a fifth of what we used to get, you know, and stuff. A fourth to a fifth, I mean it could, we just looked at that a little bit going on the computer and stuff. I don’t remember figures from ten years ago very well, but I like say it’s, its way down. And I like that; I wish the government would get out of farming, you know, and let us... cause when they give you money they always...

MR: Sure you wanna say that on tape? [laughter]

CR: No, I mean, when they give you money they, there’s always stipulations that go along with it. And it would be better if we can get our exports where they need to be so we can sell our crops at a marketable price without having to worry about if you’re going to get anything from the government. I mean, I don’t think there’s too many farms out there that would like to farm knowing the government’s, you know, handing them money, you want to do it on your own stuff. But, when corn was a dollar eighty or two dollars a bushel, you, you weren’t making money, you know, you kinda needed that money just to survive, and stuff, so…

GM: Do you see any big trends, like in price. You know, you said it came up but, any idea why or what influences that?

CR: The export, we didn’t have as much carryover in our market, you know crops, and our exports have been really good. And now, you know, we’re just talking, some companies or countries are going other places to get their things now and the exports are going down, so our prices have kinda went down. I forget what our one buyer said the other night, it was, what the exports, the one country was down 35% from what it was this year, the same month, last year to this year and stuff, so. But the prices are still very good right now, I mean, we have to be thankful for what we have right now, or what we’ve gotten.

MR: Our, our, um, regulations are very restricted, you know, to how we have to raise something, or grow something too, and other countries aren’t. So, so that still keeps American a little bit in the edge. But they are learning.

LB: Okay. What does that look like when you’re talking about the, like, regulations, and stuff?

MR: Just on certain things, on what, how are they saying that, is, with the animals there’s certain ways the USDA regulates how you have to raise the animal.
CR: Well, some countries who don’t want, ah, genetically modified crops, like, you know. We have Roundup Ready soybeans which mean, around our soybeans, we can go out and spray a roundup, which will kill basically anything, any weed, unless it’s resistant. You know, you can spray that right on the soybean and the soybean’ll live, but the plants will dye, the weeds’ll dye. A lot of countries don’t want that cause they haven’t done their own studies, you know, to see if it hurts a human, you know, and stuff. And the same way with corn and everything, there’s just like I say, some of our exports are probably affected by that because, you know, they want to do their own study, not say, here, America says you can do this. I mean I’ve heard people say you can drink that chemical. It’s…

MR: Yeah, it’s soap and water.

CR: It’s just a soapy detergent and stuff. But, I’m not going to drink just cause somebody told me that. You know.

CR/LB/GM/MR: [laughter]

MR: But, umm, I guess what I was trying to say is, I think America is so advanced in all of their studies. That we actually, our yields are that good, that, when you look at other countries, they’re not there yet.

CR: Well, we’ve tried to show other countries how to grow soybeans and corn, that kinda comes back to, you know…

MR: That’s why we had to, yeah… We’re hurtin' ourself. That’s going to nip us, you know, that’s going to hurt us. They’re not going to need us when they can…

CR: It comes back to haunt you in the end, once they get established and stuff so…

MR: That’s what I guess I was trying to say. Is that we’re a very advanced, and um, even China wasn’t as advanced as we were, and now they’re up there.

CR: No, yeah China, China has so many people, they grow such little crops. Their average farm is like an acre, an acre and a half of corn, you know, and their, their yield is, I forget, like ours is like probably, I forgot, I went to a meeting last -- like ours is like a hundred and sixty on average cross country and theirs is like, more like, fifty to sixty bushel, you know, and stuff. And they’re the ones with all the, I mean we all have a lot of people, but China has a, you know, a pile of people over there, so…

LB: Yeah.

MG: Okay. So if they have such small farms on average, are farms in this area, in this country generally a lot larger, or?
CR: Yeah, I’m not even sure if what the average size farm is in, even in Ohio any more, but the, it’s kind of a trend, you know, the smaller family farms, the guys that used to milk thirty or forty cows, they’re getting out and then the big, the other dairymen are picking it up and they’re milking two hundred to five hundred, you know. The average size of the farm is getting bigger, even though we’re losing farm ground, the size of the farms are growing and stuff, so.

GM: Do you think that’s a good thing or a bad thing?

MR: I personally think it’s a good thing.

CR: I do, but at the same time, it’s kinda getting like factories. You know, you don’t have the family farm anymore, you know. If you don’t, before you could kinda get into farming if your family was in it, now, you know, it’s a lot harder for people to get in, if you, unless you have a rich mom and dad or uncle, you know.

MR: If they leave you a farm.

CR: Yeah, you know I mean it’s very hard to get into farming now with the price of equipment and stuff. I mean we don’t buy new equipment and we’ve been farmin' for years. We just buy used equipment because, I mean, it’s just outrageous what some new equipment costs. So we just buy good used stuff and put a little money into repairs.

LB: Yeah.

CR: It seems to fit us a little better, so…

GM: Makes sense.

LB: What machine on your farm do you think you use the most or is the most valuable to you in the work that you do?

CR: Oh my, that’s a tough one. The combine, we um, we, I mean, we have to have, we actually have two combines, and two planters cause I mean when you need to go in the spring and the fall, you have to, you know…

MR: And I guess you have to have a tractor.

CR: What honey?

MR: You have to have a tractor.

CR: Well yeah, but we have extra tractors. I mean we try to keep our planting equipment up to date, cause you don’t want that breakin' down on you. And in the fall, like I say, have a good combine around and stuff, so.
LB: What’s the total fleet of equipment that you have to do the planting and harvesting?

MR: A lot.

CR: Uh, the ones we actually use for planting and harvesting: we have two combines, three trucks, and…

MR: Grain trucks.

CR: Grain cart, yeah, grain trucks, not pickups, um, we probably have actual six tractors that we use a lot for harvesting, we probably have twelve tractors, ten or twelve tractors, I’m not, I don’t mean to sound stupid but I don’t [laughter]. Umm, we have…

MR: It’s a huge inventory.

CR: Yeah, like some of them don’t do very much or there…

MR: They all have different purposes.

CR: We have a couple old ones that are antiques we just have around but we still run grain augers and stuff with them, but, I mean they aren’t, they may not be worth all that much, but...

MR: In a given day we could have five people in the field, fields.

CR: Most days, other than my dad was sick this fall, he was, and stuff. Yeah, usually there’s, well there’s still five without Dad, there’s six when Dad helps, so...

GM: How have you seen your land change since you’ve been farming? Have you seen any changes?

CR: The land? Oh I, what do you mean by that?

MR: The soil content?

GM: Just like the actual field and the soil quality, I guess.

CR: If you, when you rotate your crops, you get improved soil quality. I mean, we don’t grow a lot of hay, hay is a real good way to rotate but its very labor intensive and, and stuff. But you know, just, just by the application of manure and fertilizer you improve and then like I say if you throw a field of hay or a couple fields of wheat in there it breaks the soil up, allows it to break down better and it’s, you know, just like… From Mother Nature, I mean, even a good winter helps your soil improve. You want a good hard freeze to, like this fall, if you were on it when it was wet and it packs it together real tight. You want a real good hard winter to break the soil apart when it freezes and thaws and stuff, so. We’re seeing [unclear] go out in the fields when it’s wet whether your planting it or
harvesting it, cause those tracts of compaction will be there next spring, and stuff, so…
Like I say, unless you get a good hard freeze and stuff, that does a lot for you. You know,
Mother Nature again, doesn’t cost you anything; you just hope you don’t get too much of it, so.

MR: And they also put back on what they take off. They’ll test, they test all of their soil.

CR: Oh manure, yeah manure and stuff, I mean manure is very important and stuff, so..

MR: The soil quality would always be ready to [unclear]…

CR: And a lot of it is, you have what you have. I mean, you can have what we consider
very good soil and you can go down the road and it’s another farm, same area, and it just
has a different soil type it’s clay, or something, and it’s real tight and it stays wet, and if
it’s wet in the spring and you get a hot summer then it just dries out and you won’t grow
that good of crops, I mean it… A lot of it has to do with what Mother Nature gave us, you
know, from years ago and stuff, so.

LB: So do you have good soil?

CR: I’d say we have above average soil for Wayne County. We don’t have the best in
Wayne County, but we have, you know, I’d say above average stuff.

LB: Before you rent a field do you do extensive soil testing and…

CR: No we don’t, we kinda, you just kinda watch what neighbors have grown over the
years and stuff and you can pretty much tell, you know.

MR: And you know if it’s been depleted to put back on, and you know you’re going to do
better…

CR: And you can tell a lot from driving up and down the road. I mean, you just watch
what other people do and stuff and you can, you know. If we rent it, we’ve, yeah we’ll go
in and soil test it and try to build it up over time, you can’t do it all in one year, and stuff,
but you know. But um, like I say, you can tell a lot from the road, and the people rather
they owned it or whoever rented it before, their farming practices or, yeah or habits, and
stuff so.

GM: What’s your typical crop rotation?

CR: For the most part corn and soybeans, we just flip-flop em back and forth. We have
about eight hundred acres of each, and then we throw some wheat and hay in there and
stuff. But um, not very much hay, probably, I don’t even, twenty-five, thirty acres of hay.

MR: You used to have a lot.
CR: Yeah, we used to have a lot till we got smart. I mean it’s good for your soil but it’s not easy makin’ hay.

LB: Why is it labor intensive?

CR: Well we still do the small square bails, umm and…

MR: So you have to… It’s just more work.

CR: You just have to, you handle each one of em two times until you get it in the mound. And to either feed it or sell it you got to handle it again. I mean a lot of guys have done to the big square bails but we don’t have that much to do. If we do that, we rent, or hire someone to do it and stuff. But, till you mow your hay, and you rake it once or twice and then you bail it, and then you, I… it just keeps goes on and on… [laughter]

MR: It’s actually one of our son’s favorite jobs. Only one of em, the one that isn’t the farmer. [laughter]

CR: It looks like it’s good money until, yeah, it looks like good money until you start to figure your time in. So…

LB: So you said that there’s practices, you mentioned before we started talking about hay, that are, umm, depleting the soil and there’s people who don’t take good care of it, like what does, what does that look like? Like bad taking care of it versus good taking care it…

CR: Well, if you don’t have good fertility, I mean your corn will get chest high and it’ll be yellow. You can just tell coming out of the ground. If the ground is too wet, corn’ll be yellow and kinda has a stunted look and then it’ll just never come out if it doesn’t have the right fertility levels. You know, it will just get about chest high and put a little ear on it about this long, and stuff. It won’t be, it won’t ever be dark green, and stuff, and then compaction, you can kind of see up and down, if you see two or three good rows of corn, and then there’ll be a couple small ones, well the small ones are where they drove the equipment when it was wet and the corn plant can’t establish its roots, take it out when the grounds packed together too tight and it just looks like stunted… Corn roots should be about this wide when it’s done and go, it can go twelve, eighteen inches deep and the stunted ones will be about this wide and only go in the ground about, you know, a few inches, and stuff, so…

LB: I always wondered why that was, the, like, kind of undulations.

CR: Well, I mean then again, some of that’s tile lines, you can put tile in the ground to dry it out and of course right over the tile it’ll dry faster and it takes longer to get out, but a lot of it has to do with compaction and stuff.
MR: And it could be a bad year.

LB: Yeah.

MR: You know like this year we had so much rain, so we did have a lot of that at first. And then, it just kind of…

CR: Mmhmm. Mother Nature dried up and stuff so…

MR: It took care of it.

LB: Are all of your fields tiled and drained?

CR: No, we have tile in a lot of the fields, but to do it right, you put em in every, like, forty or fifty feet apart and that gets real expensive. I mean we have it where we need it and in a normal year we get by with, you know. There’s very few farms in this area that are systematically tiled or, you know, from one end to the other and stuff.

GM: Is farming a pretty viable way to make a living in this area?

CR: Yeah, in this area for the most part cause it’s been family farms for years and stuff, I mean, you know. If you’ve done a good job, you can, may not make, may not get rich, but no farmer ever has a lot of cash, you always have your land or your equipment, you know, and then when you give, go to retire, you either give it to your kids, or [laughter] or sell it and stuff so… This is our son Matthew.

GM/LB: Hi!

CR: Watch what you say, it’s on tape.

GM/LB/CR/MR: [laughter]

LB: So, do you think the average American is aware or cares about, umm, modern farming?

CR: I think that depends on what state you’re in. I think in, like in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois they do care, but I think some of your, you know, Washington D.C., I’m not saying the government, I’m just saying people that don’t have a lot of farms around them. I don’t think it means, you know, as near as much to them like the people in, even in Cleveland or, you know, Cincinnati and stuff. They know there’s farms out there, but they don’t, I don’t think they realize how important it is to em and stuff. So I think it’s kind of regional, and stuff.

LB: Yeah.

GM: Do you think that it would be good to educate people about farming more?
CR: Yes and no, I mean, yeah I think they need to realize where products come from, but at the same time you go out and you say well this tractor costs, you know a hundred thousand dollars, and then they’re thinking, you’re already making enough money, you know. If you can afford that, what do you need the more, a better price for? So it kind of goes hand in hand you got to watch how you educate em. Cause, I mean, people would be really be surprised if they knew how much new equipment…

MR: They need to come out and actually work a farm for about six months to understand what all goes into it.

CR: You know, I mean you can easily get, well, we don’t cause we buy used stuff, but there’s even used combines in magazines cost two to three hundred thousand dollars, you know, but they’re only a year or two old, and people think, well if you can afford that, you know, you can afford to do whatever you want. They don’t realize that you have payments on those things just like people do on cars and stuff. It’s not like we go out and hand them cash and say “here you go.”

GM: Right. It seems like there’s a pretty wide cultural division between, kind of, people who are in the city and then people who actually know the land and are farmers.

CR: Mmhmmm. I’d say Wooster people know pretty good, you know, I mean they’re, they’re, you can’t… you drive five minutes you’re out of Wooster and you see farms. It’s the people up in Cleveland and stuff that, you know, they never get more than twenty minutes from home and they don’t realize what’s going on, so… They still think that chocolate milk comes from the grocery store…

MR/GM/LB: [laughter]

CR: …or white milk comes from the grocery store.

MR: Actually, chocolate milk probably comes from the grocery…

CR: Well it doesn’t come from a brown cow, but I mean…

MR/MG/LB: [laughter]

LB: So would you say for farming, for you, has been more business or a lifestyle that you’ve…?

CR: Lifestyle.

LB: Yeah.

CR: Truthfully, I mean that’s all I’ve ever known, and stuff.
MR: It’s probably more business now.

CR: Yeah it’s more business, but, I mean, it’s still a lifestyle. And if you, you know, you have to like your lifestyle, or it’s not a business, you know. I guess that goes hand in hand to me. I mean if it was a business and I didn’t like it, I’d get the heck out of it, you know and stuff, and we’ve never really considered doing that.

LB: Why would you say the transition, like, it’s more of a business now compared to...?

MR: I think with, umm, with the better pricing, that they’ve uh, been provided with in the last, what three four years. I think that that’s made it a little more business, more umm, you’ve had to really make sure you’re doing everything exactly right because you don’t want to lose opportunity to...

CR: Yeah, I mean years ago, if you did a good job, milk cows or had live, you know you pretty much were sure, as long as you didn’t spend a lot of money you were gonna make money, and now, everything fluctuates. I mean...

MR: It’s a market.

CR: You get a grainery for the people in Chicago don’t even know what a soybean looks like on the Chicago board of trade and they’re the ones that are determining our prices.

GM: Wow.

CR: You know, I mean I went out there one time, a group of us went out and we talked to a buyer on the train to the airport. He’s like, I don’t even know what a soybean looks like but I buy and sell em every day. You know, so it’s like well that doesn’t seem quite right, you know, you’re determining, you know, our lifestyle and stuff, and he said well that’s just the way it is.

MR: And you have to stay within knowing the markets and knowing things and you honestly can’t get behind. And that’s why I’m saying it’s a little more of business now even though it is a lifestyle, don’t get me wrong, but it’s business too because if you sat and tried to do it the old way, you wouldn’t be in farming, you wouldn’t be in business.

CR: Well, just, just the computers in general. I mean, all the new electronics, it’s easier to, you know, to follow the trends and everything.

MR: You can access stuff now. And even in the combine they have GPSs and computers and, and it’s helping you...

CR: Yeah, they put computers and things, they… they’ll go across the field and tell you what you’re yield is and how, what the moisture of the corn and it’ll make maps. We don’t have it, but it’ll make maps of the fields – it’ll be like red will be real good, yellow will be real bad, and they’ll tell, you know, you can go back over years and average it out
and see how much that wet spots affected you and stuff, but it all comes at a price, you know, and stuff, so…

MR: But that’s what I mean, it’s, it’s a little more businessy now. Yeah, it’s a lifestyle, but, you’ve got to be in the business and keep up to date or you’re going to be behind.

GM: Yeah, it seems like global markets have really affected kind of how you guys are interacting with the markets. How do you see the next twenty-five years changing with farming? Any ideas?

CR: Things just keep getting more expensive. And like I said, I think, I think it’s going to get tougher because I think we are doing too good a job of showing other countries technology and stuff and then it’s gonna… Like I see a salesman the other day told me, lately our average yields going up two percent each year. Well that doesn’t seem like a lot, but, you know when you do that for millions and millions of acres and you gain, you’re losing farm ground, so you have to make up for it, you know, with new products and stuff, and it, you know, once that gets over to other countries and stuff, it’s gonna, you know, kind of defeat our purpose, you know or come back and make it harder for us.

MR: And I know you guys have heard about the baby boom for a long time but that generations going to be out of there soon and when that’s outta there, that is going to drop the demand, a lot, so... Cause I don’t see you guys having six, seven kids.

GM/LB/MR/CR: [laughter]

GM: Not quite there yet…

CR: Crazy if you did.

LB: Hopefully not!

MR: You’re waiting longer. You’re waiting longer. Even when my husband and I got married, you know you’re waiting longer, we had friends that already had four kids by the time we had one!

LB/GM: [laughter]

MR: You know, so you’re waiting a lot longer, and that’s going to affect the world, so...

GM: Yeah, there’s population change.

LB: So, you were saying your sons, one of them is more a farmer, and one is not?

MR: This is the farmer.
CR: This is the one, he works on the farm with us and stuff. And Mike, he, he took business at Wooster and he’s looking, I mean he helped coach football there this fall and, he, he’s totally undecided.

MR: He likes his cattle.

CR: Yeah, he likes livestock, but he doesn’t like the tractor part of it, and stuff. And we’re more the tractor end of farming now than we are the livestock and stuff. He just, he’s trying to decide what he wants to do. I mean he likes coaching and… but you know…

MR: He loves country life.

CR: He doesn’t know if he wants to do it for a living and it’s tough to find jobs now. So he helps a neighbor do some excavating work and stuff and, so.

LB: When you say the tractor end of things, what do you mean by that?

CR: Fieldwork.

LB: Okay.

CR: Yeah, crop work, crop stuff.

LB: This is probably a question that will reveal my complete ignorance about your lifestyle, which so fabulous. Um, what, when you, where does the corn and soybeans go that you grow? Like where does it…

CR: We, well a lot of ours will go to a, the corn will go to, there’s a Cargill feed plant in Wooster, and it goes down there and gets ground up, into, pig feed, steer feed, horse feed, and stuff. And then we sell a lot to Mansfield, to a grain terminal, and it will go, um, to a lot of hog and chicken farms, maybe in North and South Carolina, they send a lot down there. And then they soybeans go up to a, a, processing mill up at Bellevue, Belleville Ohio, no Bellevue, about an hour from here, and they crush it and make it into soybean oil for cooking and stuff, so.

LB: Hmm. That’s really interesting.

CR: But most of our corn will end up in… Well even some of the corn though will go to, umm, I can’t tell you what state, but it’ll be made into corn sweetener for pop and, you know. I don’t know exactly where ours goes.

MR: Don’t say that.

M/LB: [laughter]
MR: That commercial.

CR: What?

MR: Fructose or whatever…

CR: Ohh… Well, they ask! I mean, a majority of ours goes to animal feeds.

MR: We had some go to ethanol plants for a while.

CR: To what?

MR: Ethanol plants. Didn’t Cargill sell to ethanol and…?

CR: Well Cargill did and the Town and Country. Yeah, we did send some to an ethanol plant, but, for the most part. I don’t, I guess once we sell it to Town and Country Co-op I’m not a hundred percent sure where it goes, I’ve just heard talk about these different, you know, places that they send and stuff. They send it out by the rail, by rail cars and stuff, so.

MR: So everybody has a purpose. You know what I mean, each grain, grain setup has where they’re going to be specializing in who they sell too.

LB: How does the co-op work? Do farmers just bring in, I guess I mean…

CR: When do you sell it?

LB: Yeah, yeah, like how do you…?

CR: When you need money.

LB: Yeah.

CR: [laughter] I mean that’s…

LB: Do you chart like where things are high and things are low…

CR: You chart, you know, you have an idea. And like I say, a lot, when you kinda set a target price, if you get, you know, you want to know what it cost you to grow the crop, and then when you can get a price that’s above that, you know, you want to sell. We, we sell a little bit at a time, trying to average things out. You can’t always try to hit the higher market cause it’s not gonna, well it won’t work for us. Other people follow maybe closer than we do.
MR: We have some buyers out there too that will call us up and say, hey corn is doing this today we want to know, do you want to sell today or do you want hold and maybe see what it does tomorrow, so...

CR: Yeah we have a thing down at the farm, or down at my Dad’s. Not a computer, but a data line, and it has the Board of Trade on it and you can kinda follow it up and down. You can call most places and set a price, say I want seven dollars for my corn and [cell phone rings] they’ll somehow, I’m not sure, they put a target it and when it hits seven dollars, even if it’s just for two seconds it gets sold automatically. Or you can, you know, follow it yourself, you know, and try to hit it, which I don’t do because I’m never, two seconds isn’t fast enough for me to decide what I want to do. So, you know, you just pick a price and you try and sell it at those increments, or whatever, so.

LB: Interesting.

GM: Yeah.

MR: That’s why, I mean, it’s more of a business than used to be.

CR: It’s not a regular paycheck. Aw, I mean, we take a regular paycheck out, you know, to live on but, I mean, you just kinda, everything gets carried over, and like I said sometimes if you have to pay income tax or, you know, you’ve got a bill to fix a tractor, you have to sell something, whether you want to or not, you know, to have the money to do it, so…

LB: What does this time of year look like for you? Are you planning for the next growing season, or…?

CR: We bought most of our seed last week, and we’re getting ready to buy fertilizer, and figuring up our income, our tax, see where we stand on taxes and stuff. But yeah, this, this is the time of year, December, you kinda plan ahead for next year and buy what you need to and stuff to grow your crops, so…

LB: Are you still selling? Do you still have, have…

CR: We sold. We still have a lot of corn and beans left, but we’ll probably wait until after the first of the year and starts selling again then, so, unless somebody offers me a real attractive price. [laughter] It’s just a bad time, when you don’t know exactly how much your money’s on the farm, you don’t want to sell more and then have a tax problem, you know, or whatever. So we just kinda take the month of December to figure out where, how we did for the year, you know, good or bad, and then start over next year and stuff, so…

GM: Yeah. When does your planting season start in the year, typically?
CR: Normally about the, from about the twentieth of April on, and stuff. I mean, you hope to be done by the middle of May, this year we weren’t done until the middle of June, but, I mean, this year we didn’t even start planting until, I don’t…

MR: June.

CR: I don’t think we started planting, we started planting beans a little earlier in May, but I’m, first corn we planted was like the tenth of May this year, and stuff. And like I say, we finished up the corn about the sixth or seventh of June.

MR: They get the ground ready too, in probably late March.

CR: Yeah like I say… No, you can’t do it in March around here. It’s too cold.

MR: You don’t plow in March?

CR: Oh March, plow, yeah,

MR: That’s what I’m talking about.

CR: I’m sorry, yeah. Depending on the ground, yeah, you can, well we’ve plowed a lot in March depending on Mother Nature again. We keep referring to her, but she does play a big part.

CR/LB/GM: [laughter]

GM: It makes sense, though.

LB: What are the adjustments that you’ve made, umm, just between this year and like what are you taking from this year to put towards next year in your planning?

CR: I’m trying to decide if I want to go more no-till, where you don’t plow it or anything; you just go in and plant it. Or this happy medium in-between where you just work the top a couple inches, you know, just things that will save us money, you know, as long as it’s cost, beneficial…

MR: Keeps the yields the same.

CR: You know what I mean, we can sustain our, you know, our average yields, and stuff, you’ve just kinda got to weigh your options out, and stuff. But, that’s just kinda what we’re in the process of now. And deciding what fertilizer we want to buy because, you know, one costs more than the other but will it do as good a job, or not as good a job. Hope I’m answering your question. [laughter]

LB: Yeah! You are! Yeah, this is awesome!
GM: Umm, since we’re in a sustainable agriculture class, what do you guys think about, kind of the sustainable movement that’s, I know this is kind of an ambiguous term.

MR: You know what, I’m not allowed to, I can’t…

CR: Well, explain to me what you mean by sustainable.

MR: Remember, that’s what the farmer is at the hospital…

CR: Ohh…

MR: My little farm that I…

GM: No, honestly, I, I am curious what your opinion is cause I think there is a lot of controversy, controversy over it.

MR: I can’t make an opinion.

CR: What do, what do you mean by sustainable?

GM: Umm, kind of more environmentally friendly practices. The organic movement, local movement, it’s very vague.

MR: No chemicals.

CR: See that’s really, yes, that’s what I was saying about some of our crops have the, you know, insect protection and stuff. I don’t have a problem with, you know, environmentally good things, you know, I’m not, you know. Some people can make it work on a farm this size and some people can’t. I’m not ready to – we have neighbors that are organic farmers like ten, twelve minutes from here and they may get good prices for their crops and everything, but I’m not going to look at the weeds and stuff. I guess, you know, that’s not my style.

MR: And actually, I believe that the weeds, there’s gonna be something in there that is going to create the product not be the same.

CR: But they, they have, they have a rotation, they have their ways of getting rid of weeds. And it takes a while when you go organic to get it mastered, I mean, it’s not like you can just jump right in, you know. You have to be, like, chemical free for three years before you can be considered organic, or whatever, so I mean, you can load up on Roundup for a few years, but I mean, weeds are still going to come cause there are more and more weeds every year that are organic, or are Roundup resistant that it’s not gonna… We’re running into that now with a couple weeds and stuff, so. I mean, that’s great if other people want to do it. I’m not ready to make that switch, you know.
MR: Mother Nature does play a huge part in that one. The hospital has a little sustainable plot and when it rains, we’re pulling weeds, and, and we can’t get even close to getting them out of the ground. And they’re hard weeds; they’re not little simple weeds like you get here in your yard that you can... they’re hard, so...

CR: And, I mean, you’ve got to have patience to do that. I mean, it’s something you really want to do, and stuff, and like I said I’m -- I don’t want to say that I have too much pride because, I mean, they may be making more money I am, but I’m just, I don’t like to look at weeds, you know, and stuff. [laughter] I’ll pay little more to have a clean field and, even if I make a little bit less.

MR: They are – but I don’t know how different nutrition value you’re getting with this versus this.

GM: That’s true.

MR: And I’d love to see that more than anything else.

CR: Well they, I don’t know…

MR: I’m not sure they’ve actually been able to ever determine if the nutritional value, all you, you’re really hearing is that there’s no chemicals in it. But, is the nutritional value a hundred percent the same because if you grow em with weeds, something, somebody’s getting something. [laughter]

LB: Yeah.

MR: You know it’s taking the moisture for the weed to grow, so you can’t tell me you’re getting full moisture to the plant.

CR: I’d just say, to be sustainable or organic you have to really, to make it work good you have to really work at it. I mean, I have a friend at, up by Sterling and, I mean, he, his grandkids go out -- his son’s organic, he’s not, and his, I mean his wife and grandkids are out walking their corn rows with hoes and pickin’ weeds and stuff, you know. But they do a very good job at it, I mean, they, you know. And then again your rotation, if you grow a lot of hay or something, that helps keep the weeds down. So you want to have a good rotation when you’re organic, and stuff, so. It just has to fit everybody’s farming practices or, you know, what you’re after and stuff, so.

LB: Will that kind of, like, labor difference, obviously the scale would have to be significantly different if you’re doing…

CR: Mmhhmm. And then, they say it is; I’ve never priced it. But, I mean, they sell organic milk and everything and that, you know. Like I said…

MR: But you guys are paying for that because you’re gonna pay double the price.
CR: Well, and they have to ship it, they have to ship it like, I think out of state to get it processed, the organic milk. So I mean, they need to get more, because they have more expenses, you know, to get it hauled out of state, to get it processed and everything, so. And they can’t buy corn from a farmer, like myself, they need silage. If they have a bad corn crop, they can’t buy it from us because it’s not an organic farm. They have to buy it from an organic farm, which has got to cost them more, well a lot more money if that guy doesn’t have extra corn to sell and stuff, so. That’s, that’s tough, I mean, that, organic, you know. There’s a lot of things, you can’t give shots, if you get, you know, sick animals, there’s certain things. I have a – that same friend up in Sterling, he can get pink eye in animals and stuff. I’ve, what was that, honey I told you… elderberry tea.

LB/GM [laughter]

CR: If you mix up elderberry tea and put it on that eye of an animal, it’ll take care of the pink eye. They have a whole book of organic remedies and stuff, I think it was elderberry, don’t quote me, I mean it was something. You know, they mix it up and they’ll squirt it. I mean, some people will throw salt in that eye, cause that’ll, you know, I mean, it has to burn like heck. We’ve never done it, you know, but, I mean, that was always a remedy, put salt in it and it’ll take care of the pink eye, and stuff. But, it seemed more like… cruelty to me.

LB/GM/CR: [laughter]

MR: I don’t know. I personally have had some organic meat from neighbors, and it has no taste.

CR: But it was a chicken, honey. It was a grass, it was an open, a grass-fed chicken on a range and part of my problem was I knew what I was eating. [laughter]

LB: Right! [laughter]

MR: It was pretty bland. I mean, you don’t add some grain to something, you’ve got no flavor, whatsoever. But that’s, you know, hey, each live their own. Whoever would like to have… I’m not sure it’s gonna change your life expectancy, but, they do feel that, but I…

CR: I mean I don’t know if you guys are vegetarians or whatever and stuff, but I mean, I’m not. I just know that, you know, that wasn’t for me, but… Other people create, just create, you know, this stuff. That’s, hey, whatever makes people happy. That’s why we’re all different. Everybody has a different opinion on things, you know, nobody’s right or wrong, it’s just what you believe in.

LB: Um, so you talked about thinking about no-till. For you is that purely about, um, cutting down labor, or have you thought about, like, conservation practices and that kind of thing.
CR: It’s a little, it’s, it’s conservation, it’s cutting down labor, and it’s uh, well soil erosion, which would be conservation, yeah, and less fuel. I mean, it just kinda, you know, it does all of em. But we’ve done it in the past and we’ve had good results and bad results, we haven’t been, you know, extra consistent with it and stuff, but, it’s, you know, it is a good way to go, and we’re doing more, we’re doing more conservative approaches to farming all the time, you know. You could sell, I mean, there are some guys that all they have is a couple tractors a corn planter, and a combine, you know, you don’t need all the other equipment and stuff, so you can take a little bit less yield because you don’ have the money invested in, in your equipment and stuff, so.

LB: Right.

GM: You talked a little bit about weed resistancy.

CR: Mmhmm.

GM: Um, is that an increasing problem for you?

CR: Mmhmm. The more you use, like Roundup, the more you use the same chemical, with the same chemistry in it, weeds will just normally become resistant to it and then you’ll spray it and it’ll kind of curl and turn yellow and then it’ll come right back and stuff and when it does that, that’s why, when you spray, you wanna, don’t try and skimp on the amount of chemical you put – I mean you don’t want to double the amount – but you want to put on the recommended amount because if not, that’s what it’ll do. It’ll kind of stunt ‘em and then they come back and then over time they become resistant and then you have to, you go buy a complete different chemical that’ll kill ‘em and stuff, so.

LB: What weed species in particular?

CR: I knew you were going to ask me that!

CR/MR/LB/GM: [laughter]

CR: Matt, what’s the weed we’re fighting now in the?

MR: What’s those orange, or those yellow things?

Matt: [unclear]

CR: It used to be, um…

MR: What did he say? What did you say Matt? Ohh…

CR: Why can’t he think of it… It used to be, um… oh, I’m drawing a blank on this one. Umm… lambsquarter. They kind of, they can grow to be six to eight feet tall in the right
conditions, you know, and stuff. And now it… marestail, there you go. It’s kinda, it gets, oh it can get fairly tall, and stuff, and it just has a bunch of branches. It kind of reminds you of a Christmas tree, and stuff, I mean, it’s not a pyramid shape and stuff, but uhh, those, that’s the one that’s real pistol now and stuff. I mean I had a field I sprayed, I had a little extra spray and I was cleaning my sprayer out and we didn’t plant anything in that field this year because it was too wet in the spring, and I sprayed it, like two times and it curled ‘em and it just come right back up and stuff. So like there again, like I say, you guys have to come up with new chemistry of, or we don’t, the chemical companies have to come up with something to. I mean, you can go out and pull ‘em, but that’s kind of an endless job too. I mean, you know, if you just have a couple fields, that’s one thing, but to do a whole crop… so…

GM: Did you have to switch to a different spray to get rid of that better?

CR: We’re going, not all of them that’s trouble, not all of em right now are resistant, you don’t know which ones are, like that one field was and we’ve sprayed em in other fields and they died. So you really don’t know. And the chemical companies really don’t have a good product out yet because it’s just kind of starting so they’re in, ah, you know, kind of formulating a new one for that, so…

GM: Well, is there anything else you guys wanted to talk about?

LB/MR/GM/CR: [laughter]

CR: Not really.

GM: Well thank you so much for your time, we really appreciate it.

CR: You’re welcome.

LB: Yeah, this has been amazing! Yeah, it’s been an awesome learning experience.

MR: Do you guys want a pop or anything?