Earl Jentes
Narrator

Grace Lawton
Lauren Vargo
The College of Wooster
Interviewers

October 5, 2011
at Mr. Jentes’ farm in Wooster, Ohio

Earl Jentes -EJ
Grace Lawton -GL
Lauren Vargo -LV

LV: All right, so this is Lauren Vargo and—

GL: This is Grace Lawton.

LV: And we're interviewing Mr. Earl Jentes.

EJ: Mmhmm.

LV: All right, so, um, our first question: how long has this farm been in your family?

EJ: Probably about eighty, seventy-five, eighty years.

LV: Wow.

EJ: "Wow," yeah. That's why the road's named after us. Or I was named after the road. I'll be sixty here in a couple of months, so...but I grew up in the place just next to here. This was actually an uncle's farm, so...kinda got stuck in the area, stuck in the blood, so. And I've got four boys: three of 'em are farmin' here with me now, so—

LV: Wow.

EJ: Their granddad was down over the hill, so...we've been here for a while.

LV: So...

EJ: Not any different. Does that answer the question? [Laughter]

LV: Yeah, definitely.

GL: So, were you involved with farming your whole life—
EJ: Yeah.

GL: Or did you just sorta come back?

EJ: No, no. I worked part-time away for a year–I was in partnership with a brother–and then I was away probably a year part-time and then, when the boys were small, then we got back into it, so we've been at it ever since and we've expanded into a whatchac–a custom operation where we go with our equipment and chop corn and hay for the other farms. They hire us to come do it for them, so...that's a big part of our operation in the fall: I mean, we'll be six to seven weeks in the fall, basically doin' that, so. And then through the summer, we do hay, but the corn in the fall is the big thing. That's a branch of it. We got dairy, milk some cows–not a big one, but...but I grew up–Dad, Dad milked cows and I didn't want to milk cows until I get out on my own so.

GL: [Laughter]

LV: Yeah.

EJ: [Laughter]

LV: So, how many acres do you guys actually farm?

EJ: Oh, about seven hundred and fifty, I guess.

GL: Wow.

EJ: With what we own and rent and then, with the custom, we probably get over two to three thousand acres a year. I mean, but, mainly in Wayne County, so we don't go out of Wayne County, other than maybe into Ashland a little bit or into Medina a little bit. We don't go out of state or that far, but...we stay pretty close to home, we like to be home at night, so...

GL: Mhm.

LV: Uh-huh.

EL: Sometimes it's late, but...[Laughter]

LV: That's nice.

GL: Uh, what crops do you guys grow?

EJ: Our main crops are corn, beans, alfalfa, and wheat.

GL: Mmkay.
EJ: We run a rotation of corn—then when the corn comes off, the next year, beans'll go in; when the beans come off that fall, we'll sow up the wheat and then it'll go back to corn the following spring. Then, if we put it in hay, it'll stay in hay for three to five to six, seven years.

LV: Mmm.

GL: Wow.

EJ: Then it'll come back and go to corn, but we run that rotation: one year o' corn, one year o' beans, one year o' wheat, and then repeat the cycle.

GL: Uh, what would you say is the hardest part of farming for you?

EJ: Oh...

LV: [Laughter]

EJ: When it rains and rains and rains and rains. [Laughter]

LV: [Laughter]

GL: [Laughter] Kinda like today?

EJ: Kinda like today. But we need the rain, I mean, all the grumpin' aside, I mean it was a tough year this year 'cause we've had a—I don't know, I think we're fifteen, eighteen inches over the record—but it takes rain to make hay and it takes rain to make grain and so we had, we had a good crop, it was just a fight to get it. I mean, fightin' through the mud and geyser—

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: Still, we're do—we, we're done. We've been done for a couple of weeks, but there's still guys that got some corn out to get—

GL: Mmm.

EJ: Usually you like to be done by Thanksgiving at the latest, but the hardest thing probably is—well, the thing I hate the worst is, or, don't like the least is, is the paperwork that goes along with it, but that, that's part of it—

LV: Oh.

EJ: Probably the hardest thing is if, when a calf or cow dies or, something like that—it's just part of the process, but—

GL: Yeah.
EJ: You never, you never like to see that but it comes with the territory but...when a cow gets sick or somethin' like that, that's the hard part. It comes with the territory. It's just like kids when they get sick, you gotta deal with it and...

GL: [Laughter]

LV: [Laughter]

GL: So, what's a typical day like for you?

EJ: Mmm. I don't milk anymore, but usually they milk, they start about 5:30 milkin'. I usually go down and scrape, scrape the barns out and then I'll go to the shop and work on equipment, fixin' equipment. This time of year, we spend a lot of time in the shop during the day; I mean, there's always stuff to fix and get ready for next year and fix up from what we broke, or, has wore out from last year, and there's always some new equipment to put together or keep goin'. If the weather's nice this time of year, we, uh, we'll spend time putting drainage tile in–

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: In other words, drain the water out so the ground's fit when you get on there–

GL: Yeah.

EJ: 'Cause in the custom business, we seen it this year, the guys that had tile or drainage in their fields were a lot better off. In other words, we could get through those fields and the guys that didn't–there some guys that still got corn in the field 'cause it's just been too muddy to get to it–

GL: Mmm. They were delayed by the rain and so...

EJ: Delayed for, for the rain, yeah. That, and there's always fence rows to trim back and clean up and keep thing–'cause they keep growin' out and you gotta keep after that stuff, an'...havin' paperwork and linin' up an order an' stuff for next year; I mean, we're already buying stuff for next year's cropping.

LV: What are you gonna–what are you planting next year?

EJ: Well, we'll–we're buyin' fertilizer for next year and buyin' the seed for next year, the, uh, maybe some equipment–that's what I was lookin' at here is, maybe a new corn planter. [Laughter]

GL: [Laughter]

EJ: I mean, it'd be a used one, but it'd be new to us, but it's in a sale out in Indiana but I don't know whether we'll go there, but...you got time to think about those things, but you gotta keep, keep updatin' and things keep movin' ahead.

GL: Uh, where are you in the rotation--are you growing corn or beans now or--?

EJ: Well, I--we, we do a certain amount every--in other words--

GL: Oh, okay.

EJ: Out of that seven hundred acres, there'll probably be a hundred fifty acres of corn, a hundred fifty acres of beans--

GL: Mhmhm.

EJ: And probably two hundred acres, three hundred acres of hay and hundred fifty acres of wheat. So...

LV: Okay.

GL: Gotcha.

LV: You rotate each...

EJ: We have a--yeah, there's a, um, different fields are in the rotation--we have a certain amount of acreage every year--

LV: Mhmhm.

EJ: You know, and in the, in the--and then we switch fields, so we end up with about the same acreage of crop each year.

GL: Each year, mhmhm.

EJ: So then when it goes into another, another crop, I'll have that many acres to rotate into that crop, so...the hay is the one that stays for five, six, seven, eight years--

LV: In one.

EJ: And then it gets put back into the rotation.

GL: Mhmhm, okay.

EJ: And goes through that rotation again. If that makes sense.

LV: Yeah.
GL: Yeah.

LV: Do you mainly sell, uh, locally or...?

EJ: Right, yeah. Well, pretty much everything: we feed pretty much all our hay or we sell at local dairies. Uh, the beans are cash-sold and they're put on a semi and go up to Bellevue or Clarksville, one of the terminals. And–

LV: Mmhmm.

EJ: And, uh, corn, we feed most of that...hay we feed most of. The wheat sold...goes to, goes to the terminals. I don't know if it goes to a flourmill or whatever but it goes–that's a cash crop.

LV: Mmhmm.

GL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Then we bale the straw and use the straw for beddin'. So, that's kinda how those end up.

LV: So most of, uh–you make a lot of money from the dairy farming here or, that's a big part of what you guys do?

EJ: That, that's a big part a–but it's twice a day, seven days a week, three-hundred and sixty-five and you even have to do it on Christmas, so I mean it's–

LV: Mmhmm.

EJ: Um, it's a big part of it, but it takes a lot to feed it and keep it goin' and haul the manure out and everything that goes with it. Keep the calves comin' that–I mean, we raise all the heifer calves and then they replace into the herd.

LV: Oh, cool.

EJ: When the older cows have to go and if you get ahead enough, why, then we either expand or sell off heifers–

GL: Mmm.

EJ: When they're time to milk. But the custom–I mean, there's two of the boys that're in the custom pretty good and one of 'em in the dairies and it takes both of 'em to get it all done and there's not a lot of–there's a lot of money in it, but it's a lot of handlin' money, I mean, there's not much left when you're all done.

GL: Hmm.
EJ: A lot of people wouldn't work for what we do, so...[Laughter]

LV: [Laughter]

GL: [Laughter] Are you happy that your sons— that the three of them went into farming?

EJ: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah...that's kinda neat. I mean when, when, uh, they were small, I thought if one of 'em wanted to farm and keep it goin', I thought that would be good—

GL: Mmm.

EJ: But I never dreamt that three of 'em would be interested in it. But...and the other one is around, I mean, he works at a, at a shop up the road here, but he's around in the evening and during the busy times, he helps us too.

GL: Well, that's good.

EJ: Yeah, it's kinda, it's kinda neat that they're interested in it.

GL: Yeah.

EJ: That doesn't always happen, but—I don't know why we're blessed that they are, but they do.

GL: [Laughter] Um, so what are major purchases from time, er, from year to year, would you say equipment would be the main—?

EJ: May—that would be one. The other one would be fuel and fertilizer is—

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: Two big ones, plus your seeds, but, you know, goin' through some of the figures, it's phenomenal the amount we spent in fuel—

GL: Hmm.

EJ: But then the custom—in other words, the custom, we take a chopper and we'll take five, six trucks, plus another tractor, dependin' and we can go through, we probably went through close to a hundred thousand dollars worth of fuel last year, so.

GL: [Laughter]

EJ: [Laughter] So...And we probably have put on a hundred thou—you know, but that's all relative. Yeah, we've taken in maybe a hundred thousand dollars worth of beans, but we've also spent a hundred thousand dollars in fertilizer, so...

LV: So, it evens out.
EJ: Who pays for all the equipment? Who pays for all the, the other stuff?

LV: Mmhm.

EJ: So. I mean, it's big money 'cause we're handlin' a lot of money, but by the time you get the crop in and get it back out and, and pay, pay to buy the land—I mean, the land's gettin' expensive—

LV: Mmm.

EJ: This place, I've been on since shortly after I got married and we've been married over thirty-five years, so—I mean, it's paid for, so we're not buying this farm, but we're buyin' more, why it's—and what we're payin' for dirt now is a lot more than what we paid for this, so...

GL: Uh, so one thing we learned about a little bit in class is, uh, subsidies. Do those affect you at all?

EJ: Not that big, I mean, I'm in the subsidy, I guess, as, as, as in a program of farm payments that I didn't have anything to do with until I rented it, a farm or two that they were in it and kinda forced me to get into it, so I've been in it. But what I actually get out of it is, you know—I don't wanna say it's nothin' because, you know, a hundred bucks is somethin' but, in proportion to that hundred thousand dollars that we take in in beans, you might get three or four thousand dollars in subsidies so in pro—in proportion, it's, it's not that big a deal. Now, there's guys that're into it more than I am and understand it better that probably get more out of it than I do but to me, it's almost more hassle than it's worth, because you gotta go in and fill out all kinds of paperwork and report the planning and when you did it and all this stuff and then—it's a lot of paperwork and I don't like it for what you get out of it, it's—I mean, it's not that big a deal in my book—

LV: Uh-huh.

EJ: I mean, I would—if he asked me, I'd just sooner get a little better price for our crops 'n' not have to deal with it—

GL: Mmhm.

EJ: Would be my—but they didn't ask me, so. [Laughter]

LV/GL: [Laughter]

GL: Uh, are there any other—so, you kinda like, that kinda sounded like a change that you thought, like, kinda getting more—like, having higher prices for food instead of the subsidies—are there other changes that you think could help improve, like, agriculture today?

EJ: Well, that, I mean the, the thing of it is the American people don't realize that we've got some of the cheapest soo—food source in the world—
GL: Mmm.

EJ: And the government, through this, I think, has kinda helped to keep it that way—I mean, if, you know, I was in Walmart the other night with my wife and the gal brought out a whole palette of eggs—you know, and she's putting eggs on there by the dozen, and I have no idea how many, but there probably been two, three hundred dozen on that palette. But, if you took—everybody wants their chickens running out in the backyard, gathering their eggs, but there's no way that a commercial outfit could raise chickens like that and supply that many eggs for less than two dollars a dozen.

LV: Mmm.

GL: Yeah.

EJ: I mean, I don't, I don't know what they actually are, but I'm sure that eggs are less than two dollars a dozen, but I mean, if you had to go physically gather your eggs and gather 'em and box 'em and take 'em into Walmart, there's no way that, you know, you could do it for that kinda, so you've got these massive chicken farms that've got thousands and thousands and they roll out thousands and thousands of eggs a day—some people don't like that, but that's the only way we've maintained cheap food. I mean, for two dollars a dozen. I don't see how they, you know, when we were kids, we raised, had a few chickens and sold a few eggs, and I was thinking we were getting seventy-five cents or a dollar a dozen thirty, forty years ago—

GL: Mmm.

EJ: So, you know, how things've changed. Not that much of price per dozen but the guys can produce so many eggs, that's the only reason they can sell 'em for that. I don't know if that answered...what was the question? [Laughter]

GL: Yeah, no, just like any changes. We really, we really just want to talk to you and learn more about what you think, so...

LV: Yeah.

EJ: Um...

GL: That was great. Um, so, have you seen a change in the government with agriculture in the U.S., like, any changes since you've been farming?

EJ: Oh, I s'pose because, uh, well, I guess I was kind of against it, 'cause, when I was a kid, they had a program in, trying to—I don't know exactly what they were trying to do, but they paid farmers not to farm, and I have a hard time with that, I mean, I can't afford to pay you to come work for me and not do anything, so how can the government afford to pay me to not raise crops? I mean, 'cause I—when I was a kid, there was a program in farmers that had wheat that was ready to combine, but they paid 'em to go mow it down and leave it—now that doesn't make sense to me when we got people across the wor—the, the Globe that're starving—
GL: Yeah.

EJ: Why we would waste what we've got--

GL: Instead of...

EJ: Just so the price would stay up so--I guess, I'm kind of against some of the government programs when they do something like that and it's, it's the same thing as the welfare system, you can't afford to pay people to do nothin'. I mean, you can for a week or so or if somebody's hurt, yeah, that's one thing, but if somebody doesn't want to work, in my opinion, he shouldn't eat. I'm sorry, that's--

GL: [Laughter]

EJ: I'm cruel when it comes to that because that, that's the way it was set up when the creator made things: if a guy didn't wanna work, he shouldn't eat and I kinda go by that. But, I guess, that kinda program is pretty much over, but I mean, now the government subsidies, they, they pay you a little bit to help you along when the prices are poor, but then they don't pay anything when the prices are better, which helps to kinda keep it even but, then it kinda messes up the supply-and-demand thing. I mean, if I can make money and make a little bit more money, I'm gonna do a really good job and I'm gonna do as much as I can. If I'm losing money in it, why do I wanna keep doin' it?

GL: Yeah.

EJ: So if I'm losin' money in it, and they help put money in it to help the program along, it's really not helping anything other than keeps things goin' along, but if I'm not good enough farmer to make money at it, why should they help me, if you see what I'm sayin'?

LV: Yeah.

GL: Yeah.

EJ: I mean if you're gonna take a job but you can't do the job, so I'm gonna pay you a little extra, you can't do it--

LV/GL: Yeah.

EJ: I mean, you can for a little bit, but it doesn't make sense. I mean, sooner or later, it's gonna come back to bite ya, so.

GL: Yeah.

EJ: I guess I would be more for the, the market, you know, if, if I can make money out of it, I'm gonna do it, if I'm losin' money, I'm not gonna do it, so...
GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: It's kinda that simple. I forget the question there again. [Laughter]

LV: [Laughter]

GL: Oh no, that's fine. Um, so how aware do you think the average American is of farming? I know you were talking to the two of us earlier about like, our sort of connections based on, like, how our, our families are 'n' all–

EJ: Now, what's the question, now?

GL: Um, like, what do you think the average American's view of farming is today? Like how do you…

EJ: In other words, your view of farmin' or how do I view the average people 'n' farmin'?

GL: Um, like the average American b–like, I feel like average Americans don't always have, um–

EJ: They don't understand.

GL: They don't really think about how food comes to them. Like, wh–

EJ: I, I, I, I think there's a lot of farmers that're not like you that're interested in comin' to find out. I mean, you'll learn it–not that I know that much about it, but I mean, most people think that they go to Walmart and get their groceries–

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: They don't know that milk comes from a cow: they think it comes from a gallon jug or a half-gallon jug.


EJ: And that's, that's sad because then those same people don't know that their bacon comes from a pig.

GL: Mm, yeah.

EJ: Well, that's part of the process and when all they think of is a pig as Wilbur in Charlotte's Web or Bambi, they don't wanna eat it. Well, but, if you look at all the eggs and all the bacon and all the ham that everybody eats, it takes a pile of pigs to do that.

GL: Mmhmm.
EJ: So, they're not all Wilbur and they're not all Bambi, you see what I'm sayin'?

GL/LV: Yeah.

EJ: But if all they do is buy their–you know, an' some people buy the ready-made box and just eat what's in there, have no idea what it comes from. They don't know if the 'tatoes that grow in the ground and the corn that come from an ear and bacon that come from a hog and eggs that come from a chicken. It's an Egg McMuffin. They have no idea, so...there's a, I guess, as I see it, a lot of people that don't understand that, think that we're bein' cruel to animals up here if we eat 'em.

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: Well, that's–they were made to eat. Now, there's, there's people that'll–you can go the other way and abuse 'em and that's, that's off the, that's off the wall the other way, but I mean, in the process, you know, I don't know if there's a question about it, but, but uh, the new thing is save the planet and recycle. Well, we've been recycling for years. Long before they talked about recycling. I mean, we grow the plant and take the feed in and feed the animal and then we haul the manure back out–

GL: To the field.

EJ: To feed the ground–

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: And it takes the plants and the animals–I mean, I don't know what these people were thinkin' that we could do away with all the animals and just eat vegetables because it takes the animals to feed the plants and the plants to feed the animals.

LV: Right, a cycle.

EJ: I mean, it's a, it's really a neat cycle–

GL: Yeah.

EJ: I mean, when you, when you look at it. But then, if they don't wanna, if they don't wanna believe that it was created and then that it was set up in a, in a, uh, cycle to run that way–

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: You know, they're up a crick, but I mean, there's a cycle there, and it, it's amazing–I guess that's one of the things I like about farmin' is to watch that cycle. I mean, we're in a winter time, we're in rain now, but you know, your flowers're comin' back in the spring, the crops come up in the spring–
GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: And then we harvest 'em and then we put 'em in and then we work all winter at feedin' 'em, makin' milk, makin' meat, makin' eggs, and whatever–

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: And it's a, it's a cycle. And it's been that way ever since I've been around. I mean, spring follows winter and summer follows spring and fall follows summer, so I mean, and that hasn't changed, so that's kinda neat.

GL: Mmhmm.

LV: Yeah.

EJ: But a lot of kids that're in town play games and eat out of a box have no idea; as long as that box is there–you know, or if they go through the drive-in at McDonald's or Wendy's or whatever–

GL: Yeah.

EJ: And the stuff comes out there–I don't think they have a connection that that lettuce and the tomatoes was actually a plant, somebody picked and hauled in–

GL: Grew, mmhmm.

EJ: And sliced up and used it any more than the bacon and the eggs and the potatoes and whatever else you eat. But, from that aspect, a lot of people don't understand, you know, what it takes, you know. That it takes hundred thousand dollars worth of fertilizer to grow, you know, enough feed to feed two, three hundred cattle to make milk, to make meat, to make hamburger, all that stuff so...but, I don't know whether you here in the fall, but the Farm Bureau has a farm foliage tour where they open up and there's several farms and you can drive around and the public get to see a little bit of what's goin' on.

LV: Mmhmm.

GL: Mmm.

EJ: And, and that's a good thing–

GL: Yeah.

EJ: But, you know, I've grown up by the farm–excuse me–it's not that big deal to me, I mean, I understand it and know it, but to have city people come out–
GL/LV: [Laughter]

EJ: And seein' a calf bein' born and stuff like that, it's incredibly amazing.

GL: Yeah.

EJ: But, you know, when you've seen a hundred of 'em, it's not that big a deal, but it's still amazing, but to somebody who's never seen it, it's kinda neat. But to see the seasons and the way the cycle works, why, it's kinda neat. I forgot the question there.

GL: [Laughter] No.

LV: [Laughter] No. Oh no, no, no, no, no.

GL: Oh no, no, that's fine.

LV: So, in class, we talked a little bit about how, like, people are becoming, like, less connected with the land as they're--

EJ: Be--because, you know, when I grew up, my uncle lived here and we lived there, and my granddad lived down there and they milked here and we milked there and everybody milked--now, we're milkin' here and we're, you know, there's three, four families here and our family that're workin' off this farm and we're farmin' more acreage--

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: And so, there's less farmers--

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: That're doin' it, so, those people are workin' in town doin' other jobs and it's just a less of a connection and unless you really work at 'em--I mean, I don't understand what it's like to go to college, 'cause I never went to College of Wooster, but you guys have and you don't understand farmin' because you haven't done it, but once you do it and get connected with it, then they understand it a lot better--

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: But the people that have an eight-to-five job or work in town, you know, you kinda get disconnected from it 'cause they buy their groceries at the grocery store and as long as they're always there, life's good. But if the farmer doesn't raise it and get it into the store, then it's not gonna be a good day, but--so far in this country, we've been blessed and that hasn't been a problem, but you--

GL: Mmhmm.
EJ: Travel some of the Third World companies–countries where, you know, they're 'bout day-to-day–

GL: Yeah.

EJ: Scrounging out what they eat for the day, why, it's, it's a different ball game 'cause I've had the privilege to travel to Africa a couple of times, went on a mission trip–

GL: Oh, cool.

EJ: To see the way some of them people live, why–but, most of 'em seem fairly happy, they didn't know any different, so that's a whole 'nother subject, right there–

GL: [Laughter]

LV: [Laughter] Yeah.

GL: Were there–did you notice different farming practices there or–?

EJ: Oh yeah. It was all by hand. [Laughter]

GL: Yeah.

EJ: I mean, very rarely do you see a tractor.

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: Now, we very rarely do a lot–much manual labor, I mean, you know, all the hay balin' is done with a big baler and picked up with loaders and loaded on trucks and trailers and–

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: Put in a barn, I mean, you know, when I was a kid, we handled all them bales by hand–

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: It's changed phenomenally in the last fifty years, really. I mean, in the last twenty years, I mean...I told my guys the other day, I mean, my dad died probably twenty, one, twenty-two, three years ago–

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: But things have really changed in that–since he's been gone. I mean, if he was to come back twenty years later, things have really changed since he's been gone, I mean, I think he'd be wowed at some of the things we're doin'.
GL: [Laughter]

EJ: 'Cause it's changed that much, so. What's gonna change in the next couple o' years or ten, fifteen years, I don't know, but, I mean there's a lot of technology out there, I mean, guys're plantin' and spreadin' the fertilizer and plantin' and harvestin' off the GPS.

LV: Hmm.

GL: Wow.

EJ: You know, I would've never thought of that. I mean, when I was a kid–and, and they've got robots that milk the cows–I mean, from start to finish–we always thought that'd be good when I was a kid, but never thought we'd see it, but the guys have been to New York and seen it, and I've seen pictures of it, I mean, it's a machine: cow comes in, she cleans it off, disinfects her, washes her off...checks each quarter, milks 'em all out, disinfects i–cleans it–the next cow comes in, the whole–I mean, it's, it's phenomenal, I mean, you need to watch it just–I mean, it's just the technology that's amazing–

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: Why we work out there, doin' it all by hand and puttin' the milkin' on yourself–

GL: Hmm-hmm.

EJ: You know it's outta date, but, when you start talking a million dollars to milk a hundred and twenty cows, you can't justify the return off a hundred and twenty cows to pay that investment back so...that's–I mean, I don't know whether I'll live long enough–the boys've talked about it, but we can't just justify the expense of doin' it, but there's, there's two of 'em probably within ten miles east of here that they just put in this summer–

GL: Wow.

EJ: And there's some up by Rittman–

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: That are in operation, so–

GL: Mmm.

EJ: It's not a, it's not a fairytale way off in another country–

GL: [Laughter]

EJ: I mean, they started in Europe but they're here–
GL: Yeah.

EJ: And the guys would like to do it, but...you gotta pay for it, so...so yeah, it, it's changed a bunch. I mean, I guess it's switched a lot from–I guess, if you wanna go clear back, the Amish do pretty much everything by hand–

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: And we've done a lot of that in the past but got away with it, I mean, now it's more thinking and figuring and stressin' and linin' up stuff and gettin' guys to do it and equipment to do it and it's, and it's a lot less manual labor, I mean, we still do some manual stuff, but not near like we used to, so I mean it's more a technology thing now.

GL: Mmm.

LV: Uh, are there any other changes, like, even not with technology, but like other kinds of changes you can think of that you've seen?

EJ: Uhh...hmm. I guess, back to what I was sa–the one thing that's hurt as much as anything is–and it gets into a long debate and you can argue both ways, but every once in a while, the animal people will dig up an abuse case and will make a major scene of it and that puts the whole farm industry in a bad light, but I don't have to tell you that if I went down Beall Avenue, the College of Wooster undercover, I could probably come up with a video of some off-color stuff or stuff that, if you put it on t.v. after, you know, it would give Wooster College a bad name.

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: So, I mean in my opinion, that's the same thing that's happened to us: we've had a few incidents, or somebody that's really radically picked out somethin'–and drummed it out of proportion–

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: And give it a bad name. That probably is one of the things that's changed, bein' as there's a lot of people that don't understand farmin' and you get somebody that promotes a bad deal, whether their agenda is that we wanna do away with animals or just tryin' to do something to, to generate money, you know, I mean, some of it I think is they try to generate money because, "oh this poor dog here or this poor cat or somethin', send money and help it out." Well, people will do that. Same thing with, with orphans in other countries. "Oh, look at this poor child, send money," well, if you got the right knack for it, you can drum up a lot of money and support on that, whether that's why they're doin' it, I'm not smart enough to know, but I mean, that is give us–give farmin' a bad name. I think one of the things when–what you're doin'–is talkin' to people that're real farmers and gettin' a perspective of what they go through and understand a little bit helps the general public understand it.

LV: Yeah, that's really what we're tryin' to do is learn more.
EJ: Well and that, that's a good thing. I mean, Farm Bureau and a lot of things, when they're tryin' to promote it and get the picture of it, but some of these things, guys, I think are out--I don't know if it's actually undermining it--but to make it a big story to make money off it--

GL: Yeah.

LV: Mmm.

EJ: Then the, you know, bad news travels fast and bad news, er, nasty stuff or whatever, makes big news--

GL: Yeah.

EJ: And you get the "wow" fa--factor in there and people eat it up and then they'll send money to fight against it--

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: I guess, but, that's the only way I can explain it but I mean, ninety-eight, ninety-nine percent of the farmers that're out there are doin' a super good job and, you know, why would I do it if I'm gonna lose money at it? I mean, I'd like to make money in it--I don't have to make a lot of money in it. We make, you know, like to make a livin' at it and we've been blessed and have--but, you know, it just doesn't make sense, some of the stories that come out that give you a bad name, but there's, there's few cases out there that could do a better job and if you wanna twist a story and make it look bad, you can make it really look bad.

GL: Yeah.

LV: Mmhmm.

GL: Uh, kinda going along with that, do you think there are people who think that, um, like, the big scale farming has, like, negative environmental impacts?

EJ: Oh, I'm sure people will think that, because, they always look at the big guy and say, "Oh, he's makin' lots of money," or "he's doin' this" or whatever an' to some degree, some of the big people have gotten big and they've neglected some of the sma--I mean it's, it's the small things in life that, that make the big things work--

GL: Uh-huh.

EJ: And the bigger you are, the small things--little, small things--may get overlooked and, uh, uh, it can probably have some negative affect but, in the long haul, um, I don't know, I guess I don't know how I wanna say it...you know, how big is "big?" To the people in Africa, I'm a humongous, big farm.
GL: [Laughter]

EJ: Because, you know, if they have one or two pigs, they're wealthy over there; well, if they find out I have a hundred cows, they think I'm just–ungodly wealthy. Well, we're a, we're a small operation, really, I mean 'cause there's, you know, four and five hundred–lot of four and five hundred cattle operations in Wayne County and there's two and three thousand, close to four thousand operations, so I mean, to them, we're peanuts. But the bigger they are, the more stuff they gotta cover and the more ground–or, more ground, you gotta have more feed, you gotta bring in–course then, the more manure you have to haul out and–

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: You know, then there's–the bigger it is, the bigger the problems.

GL: Uh-huh.

EJ: Yeah...

LV: So, do you–would you say farms should be a specific, like, size to scale or would you say there's just different problems that come with different…?

EJ: It's just different set of problems. I mean, we all have the same amount of rain, basically, and the same amount of sunshine. If a guy can get more done–

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: You know that's, that's what's built this country is that the capitalism–

LV: Mmhmm.

EJ: Some guys can farm two hundred acres and that's about all they can get done and some people can farm two thousand acres and get it done just as well–

LV: Mmhmm.

EJ: So, I say go ahead and do it–

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: I mean, it takes more man power, but I mean, we do more than we did ten years ago, but we've created more jobs, I mean–and it's, and it's a, it's a cycle too: the more we farm, the more we need fuel, the more we need electricity, the more we need rubber tires, the more we need oil for our vehicles, the more steel we need and the equipment, I mean–ninety percent of our equipment is fuel and the other thing is the technology that's in it, I mean, when you talkin' a three, four hundred thousand dollar piece of equipment–
LV: Mmhmm.

EJ: There's steel in it, there's plastic in it, and there's, there's paint and there's technology and there's light bulbs and, and you stop and think all the things that it takes to make that, if we're gonna buy that piece of equipment, then we've created a job for all those people who created that tractor or combine or pick-up truck or whatever. I mean, so it's not that we're out here by ourselves in the big entity, the more we do, the more, the more, uh, uh, lumber we need to build a shed to put it in, the roofing to put on it, you know, and the concrete to put in it, so I mean it's all, it's all a–we need other people as well as they need our food.

LV: Mmhmm.

EJ: I mean, you know from the people that build windows to put in the room we got here–

GL: Hmm, hmm, yeah.

EJ: And the chairs we sit on, I mean, it's all plastic and steel and materials–

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: So I mean it's, that's why we need kids that go to college and learn how to do that stuff.

GL: [Laughter]

LV: [Laughter] It's all connected.

EJ: Yeah, it's all connected. But I don't see that, you know, I don't know.

LV: Would you say that you're part of a farming community here? Do, like, the farmers all work together–I know you have your custom business, but...

EJ: I would say we're, we're blessed here, I mean, uh, we've got a lot of farmers that we get along great with you know.

LV: Mmhmm.

EJ: Now there's some places where it's, it's a real–

LV: Yeah.

EJ: "Get ahead of the Jones"–you know, this guy's gotta–

LV: Uh-huh.

EJ: Butt heads and get a–I'm not that way, and I'm not sayin' that there's guys out there that are that way, but I mean, yeah, we've got a, a good area here, I think. I mean, 'cause part of the neat
thing is, in the past—well, I don't know how many years—there's been guys that have, have got
injured or there's been a death in the family or somethin' like that, and to see the community
come together—

LV: Mmhmm.

EJ: And go and do his harvestin' for him or his plantin' for him—

LV: Mmhmm.

EJ: Or, you know, make his hay for 'im or somethin' like that, you don't, you don't see that in, in
businesses in town—

GL: Yeah.

EJ: It's kinda a farm—I mean, if it happened to me, people know that you got work to do and it
needs to be done in a timely manner and if it happened to somebody else, you'd go and help 'em
out. We don't do as much of that as we used to because everybody's kinda got their, their
equipment, but I mean, I'm, I'm known to—it's been years ago—a gal—neighbor gal got killed up
here and the neighbor's got together and went in and hauled all the manure out in a day. I mean,
they had a big pit that takes—'scuse me—for or five days for one or two guys to take out, they
cleaned it all out in a day and, and the one guy that got run over by a tractor and was in the
hospital, we harvested all his corn and put it in the silo for him and cleaned his manure out, all in
a day because there was five, six combines there and probably eight, ten tanks there—

GL: Hmm.

EJ: And everybody comin' together and you got it done and that's, that's one of the thing's that's
kinda priceless—

GL: Yeah.

EJ: I mean, you can't put a value on it.

LV: Yeah.

EJ: But you have that in the farm community. Now that they get bigger, the guys've pretty well
got enough hired people that, if one guy's down, there's enough guys to pick up the slack within
the farm—I mean, there's one big farm, over by Marshallville there that probably the biggest in
the country—I think he hires, like, seventy people—

GL: Mmm.

EJ: Well and if one or two guys got hurt, there's enough in that farm itself that kinda takes care
of the work. Where it used to be one or two guys, you know, if I was here with one son and
farmin' and if one got hurt, you'd have lost half your work force—
GL: Mmm.

EJ: And then you need the neighbor's help, so—that's changed in the—it's not like it was where one or two guys—you know, one father and son or one father—farmed the whole farm, basically by himself and if something happened to him, well then, it was kinda up to the neighbors to come and help so that's, that's changed, I guess in the last forty years too.

LV: Uh, what would you say would be your favorite aspect of farming?

EJ: Hmm.

LV: I guess sorta what draws you to farming.

EJ: I guess 'cause I grew up with it and the—I think I like the seasons followin'. I mean, it's neat to—I don't like winter as much as I used to but it's really nice to see spring come—

GL: Yeah.

EJ: And, you know, and the bare dirt and then all of a sudden, it starts, you know, you worked hard to plant a field and then you go back a couple of days later and the green's comin' and it's comin' off and then, you know, you watch it through the summer and then the harvest comes in the fall, and that's one of the neat things about our custom work is harvestin'. Uh, it's neat to get in there in the fall of the year and harvest, I mean, it's kinda the reward all, all year's work—

GL: Yeah.

EJ: And, you know, you're two expense of—that and, it's kinda neat to if, if we're out custom but can sit back and haul—equipment's runnin', boys're runnin' an' things are goin' good—when things are goin' good, that's really good—

GL: [Laughter]

EJ: But if you get stuck in the mud or if something breaks, well then that's a different story, but—

GL/LV: [Laughter]

EJ: It all happens, I mean, it's like everything else: there's good days and then there's days that aren't so good—

GL: Yeah.

LV: Mmhmm.

[phone rings]
EJ: But, ah, there’s a recorder, don't worry about it. Don't have to listen to it–that's what you have recorders for.

GL: Exactly.

LV: Yeah. [Laughter] Um, I don't know: do you have any more questions?

GL: Um, no, I–

EJ: We gone through all of 'em?

GL: Yeah, do you have anything else you wanna, I don't know, just tell us about or–

EJ: Hmm.

GL: Or that we kinda touched on–

EJ: I don't know. I guess, I guess, you know, in the, in the, in the, the enjoyment of it is, it's, it's easy to see that God created it and that there's a cycle to it, I mean, and from the cycle of the land, but there's also the cycle of the cows and the hogs, I mean, you know the calves are born, you know, and sometimes you know, you lose a calf, and you don’t like that–

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: But they keep, keep replacin' the older generation and, uh, and the, that, that whole cycle is amazing and mind-boggling to me, I mean–

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: But to see the seeds, you know, put in the ground and sprout and come and then produce a crop and the–you know, if you plant the hay and it comes back cuttin' after cuttin', year after year, and keep doin' it, and I guess that's one of the things of farmin', you know, you always, you always hope next year's gonna be better. I mean, things go wrong and you have tough times, but next year, you always hope is gonna be better and you plan for the best you can and do the best you can and we take what we can get, but–it's satisfying but in the fact that you do the best you can and if it takes–it's like what one guy said, "If you take good care of your cows, the cows'll take care of you. And if you take good care of your ground, why, the ground'll take care of you," so–

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: I guess it's kinda neat to be a part of that cycle but, on the other hand, we think we got all the technology and all the stuff we need to do a great job but there's a couple of things we can't do: we can't make it rain, we can't make the sun shine, and we can't make the seed sprout. It does that on its own and I can't explain it–
EJ: It's just one of them amazing mysteries that's–it, it does. But we can screw it up by puttin' too much fertilizer on or too much spray or, or, uh, not gettin' out there and gettin' it done in a timely manner but when we can do the best we can an' the rest is up to the good Lord. I mean, it's the rain and the sunshine and whatever happens in that dirt that you can't explain that it, that it grows–that's the amazing part of it that has always intrigued me and I like that part of it. What was that question, though?

EJ: Oh, okay.

LV: Other than that...

EJ: Oh, okay.

GL: Yup.

LV: Awesome.

EJ: But, uh, yeah, there's a, there's a certain amount of satisfaction to seein' the crops grow and know that you've done as good a job as you can do–

GL: Mmhmm.

EJ: When it rains too much and it doesn't do as good as you can, why, that's just the way it is, but next year's another year and you keep, keep pluggin' along.

LV: Yeah. All right, well, thank you.

GL: Thank you.

EJ: Good idea; give you a little bit o' thought about–