

**John Anderson,
Narrator**

**Ellen Godbey
Kristen Sween
The College of Wooster
Interviewers**

**November 30, 2011
at Mr. Anderson's farm in Wooster, Ohio**

John Anderson -JA
Ellen Godbey -EG
Kristen Sween -KS

EG: All right, so...just for the, uh, tape, we're interviewing John Anderson about his sheep farm. And so, um, I guess we'll start off with what is the size of your farm. How many acres do you have?

JA: A hundred and sixty acres. 'bout half of that's woods.

EG: How much do you use for the sheep, then, like...?

JA: Pretty much all the, all the, uh, er—anything that isn't in woods...is either pasture or cropland and all the land gets grazed by sheep at some time during the year.

EG: Okay.

JA: Like, after the corn's off, we'll clean the field with the sheep. So, so it all gets grazed, really.

EG: Mmhmm.

JA: At some point.

KS: Um, how long have you been a farmer?

JA: Uh, see, we moved here in, I think '83. So...

KS: So since then?

JA: We probably got sheep in about '85—'86 rather.

KS: Okay.

JA: I think '86 we got our first sheep, so. Been involved with just gardening and agriculture when we're in the Peace Corps.

KS: Oh, okay.

JA: Before that.

KS: Does your wife have any background in farming?

JA: Um, well she has an agronomy major, but...and she works for USDA. She's an entomologist.

KS: Oh, okay.

JA: So...yeah.

KS: Okay.

EG: And your dad's the one who bought the farm?

JA: Mmhmm.

EG: Does he still own it or, like—?

JA: Yup. He owns it.

EG: Okay.

JA: Yup.

EG: And so you're, like, I guess "partners" would be the right word.

JA: Yeah, we're...partners with the sheep, yeah.

EG: Okay.

KS: Um, how many different people work for you? Do you have different people you pay for various...jobs and stuff?

JA: Well, I mean...yeah, for specific jobs like sharing and stuff like that, yeah.

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: Er, or we contract and have people come in and plant the corn, stuff like that.

KS: Oh, okay.

JA: Um. And we don't bale much hay anymore—most of that we contract out. Um, we have a grad student who stays here and he helps out quite a bit.

KS: Oh, okay.

JA: So. Um, the kids are gone, so. The kids are all grown up. So...

KS: They're not around to help anymore.

JA: Yeah, so. I've got a dog now. Got a border collie.

KS: Aww.

EG: So, we heard a rumor that you and your wife both have other jobs. So...

JA: Right. So I work for OSU at Ohio—up in Wooster—

EG: Oh, okay.

JA: At the OARDC.

EG: Okay.

JA: And, and Betsy works there too, but she works for USDA.

EG: Okay.

JA: Mmhmm.

KS: How do you balance—

JA: Oh, it's—

KS: Both of those?

JA: Huh. Yeah, it's hard, there's a, you know, you don't spend alotta time hanging out, so it's, 'come home and get to work,' so.

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: But, it works. I mean, you can do it. It's a, it's a part-time farm anyway—

KS: Oh, okay.

JA: It'd be hard just for me to work here. Well, I can work here all day easily—

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: But it, it wouldn't pay that well, so.

EG: Um, can you take us through a typical day on the farm? Like, what time you get up and what you do then?

JA: Well, it depends on the time of year, of course, but if you're talking about, like, a weekend, or, or when I'm home, I probably don't get up very early, 'cause I get up early to go to work, so I usually look for a chance to sleep in.

EG: Take the time, yeah.

KS: Definitely.

JA: Yeah. So, I'm probably out doing stuff. I'll have a lot of records because, we're on, uh, a genetics program, er, we're on—it's called 'Land Plan,' NSIP Land Plan, so we collect all our data on our animals and um, uh, the number born, and we have pedigrees on all of them. How many—you know, when they give birth—how many they dropped and what they weighed at birth and then what they weigh at weaning and then we weigh 'em again when they're ninety days old, so we get a post-weaning weight growth. So, then we send all this information in to, uh, a big database and, um, anyway, it's uh, they run analysis on it and we have to change—we have to move our genetics to other farms so we—and they rotate theirs through here, so we rotate rams and actually have a ram-sharing consortium and that way we get better data.

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: So I suppose what I'm trying to say is that I spend a lot of time doing records.

KS: Okay.

EG: Mmhmm.

JA: And you can see, I got a stack of books there.

KS: Yeah, I saw.

EG: Yeah.

JA: So I spend a lot of time doing records, so I might get up in the morning and do records for a little while—

EG: Yeah.

JA: And then head out and, um, but it depends on the time of year. Like, right now, we're putting the breeding groups—we're putting the rams back in so, um, you know, bringing sheep into the barn and breaking them into groups—

EG: Mmhmm.

JA: And have to record, you know, who's with what ram and all that, so. So, there's a lot more work right now, actually, than sometimes but, soon as that's done, it'll be better. There's a—in the summers, we're very busy, you work, you know pretty much as soon as you can get out there un—until it's dark.

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: But, you know, this time of year is hard to work in the dark.

KS: Right, yeah.

JA: So you come back inside. So, it's actually kinda nice. I actually look forward to the days getting shorter; I look forward to 'em getting long and then, I look forward to them getting shorter, 'cause you get worn out after awhile in the summer.

KS: Yeah, definitely.

JA: So, um, but mostly, um, it's just—for instance, we do a lot of rotation on grazing, so we move these temporary fences—I guess I didn't get a chance to show you those—but, um, we move fences around a lot, so that's, like, one way we'll use ground that maybe we made hay on before, so we don't want it all broken up into, you know, smaller units, and so you just, you move temporary fences. I do a lot of that; I move a lot of fences, so that's how I get my exercise. You just—they pull up pretty easy and just move 'em and put 'em back in the ground and they're electric and—

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: So you put a solar charge on 'em, that's how you keep the sheep in.

KS: Okay.

JA: So...lot of that right now. Uh, we're like, now, our, our hay is—it used to be all our work 'cause we did all the small, square bales—

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: So then you had to get them in the mow and all that. Well, now, um, we mow the hay and rake it and then, after that, we, we, we hire someone to come in and bale it up. And so then, we—so it's a, in large round bales. So we move it with a tractor, so. Um, once the

kids grew up, why, we had to find a way to cut some labor costs, so, that's one of the things we did, so.

EG: And, um, y'all are mostly, like, a breeding—

JA: Yeah.

EG: Sheep farm? So, who are your normal buyers for the sheep you sell?

JA: Well, I—our sheep are—we really, um, they're aimed at the commercial market, so, um, some people are more into show and stuff like that, but we really, our...we're trying to produce the ideal commercial ewe and, and rams that will help people upgrade their ewe flocks, so, um. So, Poly—we have Polypays and their breed is developed in this country, and, um, so we select for the commercially important traits and the main thing we look at is the pounds a lamb weans, so, you know, if a ewe has triplets—

EG: Mmhmm.

JA: How well do they grow? You know, did she have enough milk for 'em? Um, so we really, we really select for use and raise fast-growing twins and triplets and we've got the data to back that up. And so, it's not just how the dam did, it's how her sisters do, how her daughters do—all that data is used in a, in a BUP (?) program to determine the best genetics and—so, it's a, it's a good way to move forward—

EG: Mmhmm.

JA: And it's—it's a lot more efficient. So, it's important to be efficient 'cause feed is very expensive so you don't want to feed a ewe who's raising one lamb a year, that's...not good for ya, that's not good for the—

EG: Right.

KS: Hm.

JA: Staying in business, um.

KS: Can you talk a little bit more about, um, the lambs and, like, the, uh, it was on their stomach—like, the, um...

EG: The parasites.

KS: The parasites.

JA: Oh, yeah, they're internal parasites—

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: They get in digestive tract in the summer, you know, when temperatures are warm enough, they, they get active and, so when they're out grazing, they just, they pick 'em up while they're grazing. So—the Barber Pole Worm is the big one and it's actually a blood feeder, so it gets into the di—digestive tract and it cuts the inside of them and—

KS: Oh my gosh.

JA: Drinks the blood, basically; and so they get anemic and you can actually get white there—you look at their eyelids to determine how anemic they are. So, it'll kill in a lot of sheep—they, they definitely kill sheep—

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: So, you have to, um, deworm to get rid of those and those chemicals that we use to get rid of those worms are becoming, um, the worms are getting immune to 'em, so. So basically every time you deworm a sheep, you're selecting for resistant parasites—

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: So you don't want to deworm 'em anymore than you have to because some of them will survive and the ones that survive are genetically resistant—

EG: Right.

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: And, so, the more you deworm, it comes back to get you in the end, so. But sheep do have some genetic resistance, so, that's one of the reasons we got these Florida rams is they're, they are, uh, very resistant to internal parasites.

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: But they're small, and so the idea is to cross 'em with our commercial animals and try to develop a, a commercial type ewe that's more resistant that people don't have to, uh, keep, you know, deworming them all the time.

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: So, that's, that's what we're trying to do.

KS: Okay.

JA: This is already going on; there are producers in the area that are doing this with hair sheep—

KS: Oh, okay.

JA: But not much is available in terms of wool breeds—

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: That are resistant, so, uh, we're doing this on the advice of some researchers, so, we'll see how it works.

EG: Yeah.

JA: Also, we're selecting within our lines, so, we're selecting within our Polypays for resistance. So we're tak—trying two different approaches. An outcross and selecting within the—

EG: Mmhmm.

JA: Breed.

KS: Is this more of a recent problem, or—?

JA: Well, it's not really a recent problem, I think it's really that—looking back through historical writings on it, it's been a problem, but, it's getting worse right now, um. Maybe partly because people like us are keeping more sheep on a farm with maybe in the past there would've been fewer animals that were more integrated—

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: That may be part of it also. Also, when you s—uh, I think that the animals would've just died in the past from parasites before they had effective dewormers. You're getting rid of your, you know, your natural selection, you're getting rid of the susceptible animals and we've kept them alive: we kept the genetics alive by deworming, so...

KS: Oh.

JA: So, it's getting worse, so...

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: Um, and it's really holding back the industry, actually, in terms of pasture production. And people still—you can still—it's mostly a problem with the lambs. It's not so much a problem with ewes, um, the lambs are the ones that are the most likely to die from internal parasites.

KS: Mmhmm.

EG: Is it just because they're younger, more susceptible?

JA: Yeah, their immune systems haven't cranked up yet, basically. So, what we're looking for by—by bringing these Florida lambs is to get lambs that, uh, can deal with it early on in their life—

EG: Mmhmm.

JA: 'Cause as they get older, they develop the immunity, but it doesn't do any good if they're dead.

EG: Yeah.

KS: Yeah.

JA: So, you need to get—the, the theory is that there's, um, something called "innate immunity"—there's "acquired immunity" and "innate immunity." And the—we know our sheep have acquired immunity but the innate immunity, that theory is they—that kicks in early and helps keep 'em going until their acquired immunity comes along.

KS: And, um, so what's your favorite part about farming? What's your—

JA: Gettin' lambs.

KS: Gettin' lambs?

JA: I like lambing time—it's the most work, but it's also the most fun. You'll always wonder, "What am I going to find today?" So, you go out—and we lamb three times a year, so we have ample opportunity. It's also the most work; you really gotta stay on top of things, so. Um, and typically the ewes're, they're—our Polypays—are really good moms, but, um, still, if they're having three babies, you know, it's, it still might be hard. Especially if you're lambing outdoors, for her to—but if she wanders off or something, one of 'em might wander off or follow another ewe, so...mostly we just gotta get 'em all, uh, pedigreed. We have to know who the mom and...the mom is. So when they hit the ground, we need to get an ear tag in 'em, so—

KS: Mmhmm.

EG: Mmhmm.

JA: 'Cause you gotta keep track of 'em, so. And it's, basically, you gotta keep moving 'em so they're on clean ground. If you're letting 'em in the barn, there's a lot of animals close together, and so when they lamb, you really wanna get 'em separated right away because a lamb will easily wander off and then, if it's away from the mom long enough, she might not want it back.

EG: Oh, okay.

JA: So...

KS: What do you do in an instance where the mom doesn't want the lamb back?

JA: Well, you can try to convince her and, uh, uh, one thing if nothing else works, you can put her in a headgate and, um, so that she can't smell her lambs and then, uh, the lambs can, can just nurse while she's in that headgate. And then you wait a day or two and try—and let her out and see if she accepts them then.

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: If nothing else works, then you have to raise it on a bottle.

KS: Mmm.

EG: Have you had to do that a lot? Raising—?

JA: Not a lot, no.

EG: That's good.

JA: Not a lot, but...one or two animals per lambing, let's say. One or two...

EG: Oh.

JA: So if we have, you know, thirty or forty ewes lamb, there's usually only one or two that's on a bottle.

EG: Oh, okay. Um, then what's the least favorite part about farming for you?

JA: Heh. Usually it's cleaning out the barn. Heheheh.

EG: Understand.

JA: Yeah.

KS: Um, so, I guess you already kinda talked about this a little bit, but in the winter, is there--is it still a lot going on? I know it gets dark earlier, so—

JA: In January, cuz we lamb in January so—

KS: Oh, okay.

JA: So, we lamb three times a year. So ewes that lamb in January, we expose our lambs again in September.

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: And, and then the ones that lamb in the spring, we expose 'em again to lamb in January, so, you ask the ewes to lamb every eight months. So we do have—so, winter is actually fairly busy in January. Um, and since we've—and we've always got lambs that are—that means they're growing, so there's a weaning process and get, keeping 'em vaccinated and, and collecting the weights on 'em and entering the data, so...it's—we don't ever really run out of work. Um, in winter, the barn lambing is the hardest one because if it's cold, and you know, you get some little triplets and it's cold, you gotta get, uh, colostrum in 'em right away, and if they don't get up really to drink right away, it doesn't take 'em long to, to get seriously chilled—

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: And you may not be able to save them. So we have to stay on top of the lambing a lot more in January—

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: We have to check up on 'em more often than we do in the spring and in the fall. In spring and in the fall, usually the weather's cooperative—

KS: Yeah.

JA: So...if a lamb gets up and gets a good drink of colostrum from its mom, it can withstand a lot of bad conditions, but they need to get up and get that drink first.

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: So, winter is cold, yeah, I mean that's the main thing. And then, we have—we keep—the ewes that aren't lambing stay outside all winter—

KS: Oh, okay.

JA: So, they'll be out in probably a remote field. So, let's say we have a snowstorm—

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: You know, we have to get hay back to 'em and all that, so...

EG: Oh, okay. But they can, like, withstand the cold and—?

JA: Yeah, they can withstand anything nature throws at 'em if you feed 'em right. Yup. Just if they're properly cared for—

EG: Mmhmm.

JA: They could take about anything. And they'll walk around after an ice storm and they just—covered with ice they—they'll have a crust of ice all over 'em—

EG: Oh my gosh.

JA: And they “clack,” yeah. But, you know, you have to feed 'em right so they can produce heat.

EG: Right.

JA: To stay warm.

KS: Do you make all—like, all the hay you bale here? Is that enough to sustain them through the winter?

JA: Yes. Yeah. We sometimes have to buy corn, um, like this year we had a bad—our corn didn't come up well—

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: So we're buying, we're buying feed this year. But we make all our own hay.

KS: Oh, okay.

EG: Alright. Um, do you do any work with Local Roots?

JA: Yeah, we—

EG: Oh, okay.

JA: Betsy and I—

EG: Do you—

JA: Betsy and I are, are of the twelve founders. We're—

EG: Oh, really?

JA: Yeah.

EG: Oh, okay.

JA: Yeah, she's the president of the Board—

EG: Oh, okay.

JA: And I'm on one of the steering committees, yeah—

KS: I didn't realize that.

JA: Yeah.

EG: We just, like, were told that you were involved with it—

JA: Yeah.

EG: But we weren't sure how.

JA: Yeah.

EG: So.

JA: We were involved from the beginning.

EG: Yeah. Do you wanna talk a bit about that, like—? Do you wanna—? Start this?

JA: Well, I may as, want to. I guess a lot of it really goes back to our kids. When they went off to school and they started saying, "Hey, why are you guys not gardening anymore?" You know, our garden was getting smaller and smaller and they said, "You know you guys really should be..." So our kids actually got us more interested in local food.

EG: Oh, yeah.

JA: So, and then talking with my cousins and stuff and they said, "You know, they, they're selling out the farmer's market"—and then—"in Wooster." And they said, "You know, there's this old, empty building;" well, it turns out that building that we're in was owned by the county and they'd actually wanted a farmer's market in there—they'd talked about it for a couple of years—so when we came along and said, "We're interested," they were very supportive.

EG: Mmhmm.

JA: So, um. And so we put, you know, we got—we found some other folks what—there's—you know—that had—we had a couple other people that were, you know, doin' the sa—had the same idea. So we got together and we put an article in the newspaper and all got together down at the library and, like, more and more people kept showing up to

our meetings, and so...we finally had one that we really announced in the paper and, like, we had eighty people show up—

EG: Oh my gosh.

JA: They were really waiting—the community was really waitin' for something like this—

EG: Yeah.

JA: It sounds like. So. But yeah, that's a lot of work too. Especially for the people that work in, uh—the market managers.

EG: Mmhmm.

JA: It's a lot of work, so.

EG: Sounds like it.

JA: But it's been fun.

KS: So, is that like a farmer's market; is it open all the time?

JA: Yeah—

KS: It is?

JA: You know, it's open Monday through Saturday and, um, the farmers don't have to be there, but they own all their--they own their products so the market doesn't buy 'em from 'em. So they bring the products in and then ten percent of the sale price, um, is kept by the market—

KS: Mmm.

JA: To help pay for, you know, the rent and all that.

KS: Right, right.

JA: So they determine—so if the farmers determine the price, they each know what they need to get for it—

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: They go in and stock the market, basically. And, um—and then, Local Roots takes ten percent, and there's also some fees, like, if you're using coolers and stuff like that—

KS: Oh, okay.

JA: There's some shelf fees.

KS: Yeah.

JA: We're still working it out; it's kinda a unique arrangement, so...

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: So, we're still workin' it out, but, so far, so good.

KS: Yeah, definitely.

EG: Hm. Yeah. And is that, is it, um—oh, man, what was I going to say? Is it just the farmers go in and they put all their stuff out there, how is there—is there like a cashier or something?

JA: Yeah, so, so—

EG: So they don't have to be there?

JA: Yeah, so it's all tracked. I mean, everything's got a—they put their little labels on it. They—the farmers—they—the producers say what—you know, what they're bringin' in and, and, then they print out tags—

EG: Mmmhmm.

JA: And they put little tags on 'em so you can scan it in. So it's all tracked, you know, by the cash register and the computer system and everybody knows what they sold and so they know how much, you know, how things are goin'.

EG: Mmhmm.

JA: So we know—and so it's all very closely tracked. It's actually really cool. The Barkheimers came up with this program for you to--it's really been really big...successful. So. Um, but yeah, they pretty much stock stuff themselves and then there—the volunteers—

EG: Mmhmm.

JA: Try to keep stuff in order and a lot of times, there's volunteers and they run the cash register—actually without the volunteers, the whole thing wouldn't work. So, so, uh. But yeah, we've—I've really been surprised, uh, how many people—er, how many volunteers—and a lot of 'em aren't producers. I mean a lot of the people who work down there just like it.

EG: Mmhmm.

JA: And they—it's a happy place, you know?

EG: Yeah.

JA: They just like it. So, a lot of—we're a producer-consumer cooperative, so anybody can join and you don't have to join to shop there. You actually don't get a price break, so—

EG: Oh, okay.

JA: Um. But, uh, people, they just liked the idea—

EG: Mmhmm, mmhmm.

JA: And they liked the feel of the place. And they like supporting, you know—

EG: Local—

JA: Local farms, yeah.

EG: Are there any requirements for the farmers? Like, do they have to bring in a certain amount of produce to sell or is it just sort of—?

JA: Nah, there aren't really—

EG: Are there any—?

JA: Requirements like that, but you might lose some of your counter spaces, some of your shelf space—

EG: Oh, okay.

JA: If you don't keep it stocked, yeah.

EG: Oh, okay. Yeah, I wasn't sure if there was, like, rigid rules or something.

JA: The, the market manager has, you know, has to...if somethin' isn't workin' out, she talks to the producers about it.

EG: Oh, okay. That makes sense.

KS: Are there, um, other regulations on the crops themselves or do they just have to be local?

JA: Mostly just local and then we, we—they have a color-code, depending on how they're produced.

KS: Okay.

JA: So whether it's conventional, or, uh, organic, or—organic principles, but maybe they're not registered—

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: Organic. Certified organic, yeah.

KS: Okay.

JA: So you can tell what—you know—you can tell what, whatever you buy there, you can tell how it's produced.

KS: Is there, uh—sorry, were you going to say something?

EG: No, go ahead.

KS: Um, is it, like, all types of food or is it just, like a specific—?

JA: So, there's, like, right now the produce is kinda—we have a problem keeping up produce in there in the winter.

KS: Oh, okay.

JA: When there's high tunnels—you know, we have high tunnel producers that are bringing stuff in, but, um...but there's meat and eggs and dairy--

KS: Oh, okay.

JA: And baked goods and you can get lunch there and, uh, what's in the lunch, like—have you guys been in yet?

KS: Mm-mm.

JA: Oh, shame on you. [All laugh] You'll have to try it out. Um, the lunches are really good. We have a chef—couple of chefs actually down there—and they use products that, from the producer, you know—

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: So. Um, so it's really cool—

KS: Yeah.

JA: And so if someone, like, if someone has some extra stuff they, they didn't sell, they might say, you know, um, "Why don't you guys just use it?" You know.

KS: Mmhmm.

JA: And so the cafe'll use it—

KS: Oh, that's cool.

JA: So it's really efficient, it's really nice.

[Phone rings]

EG: Oh, you can get that if you'd like.

[Tape interruption]

EG: And then we actually just have one more question for you.

JA: Alright.

EG: Along with, like, working on the farm with your family and then also, with the Local Roots, do you feel like you're a part of a farming community?

JA: Sure.

EG: You get that sense—

JA: Mmhmm.

EG: Is it—?

JA: Especially with Local Roots.

EG: Yeah, definitely.

JA: Yeah, 'cause we're actually newcomers to the area 'cause we moved here in the 80s, so. So, although my dad's from the area originally—

EG: Mmhmm.

JA: But, um, yeah, I grew up in Michigan, so. So, yeah, I think that Local Roots has been huge with that.

EG: Yeah.

JA: So.

KS: Brings it all together.

JA: Mmhmm.

KS: Does it help other, maybe, new people to the area kinda—

JA: Yes.

KS: Find a little niche for 'em?

JA: Yup. It does. We've got new producers, yup. They just moved into the area. Some of 'em are really good.

EG: We'll definitely have to go.

KS: Oh, yeah, no, for sure.