Interview with Jim Schewe,  
with comments by Marcy Schewe  

Interviewed by Margaret Robertson  
Minnesota Historical Society  

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at the Schewes’ farm, Renville County, Minnesota  

MR: Did you grow up in this area?

JS: No, our farm was about sixty miles from here. My dad was mainly a dairy farmer and crop farmer, with some hogs. He didn't have a whole lot.

MR: Where was the farm located?

JS: I grew up around Sleepy Eye and Springfield, Minnesota. Dad farmed for seven or eight years around Sleepy Eye, then moved to my grandpa's farm near Springfield, and finally we moved up near Redwood Falls--around 1959 or 1960. That's where he settled down. Basically, he did dairy farming. It was all I really knew, then.

MR: I assume you helped with farm chores?

JS: Yes. There were nine of us in the family, including myself. My dad had dairy and some crop land. When we got a little older--I think I was about thirteen--I milked and my other brother helped with the field work. When I was about fifteen, I did all the dairying and my brother pretty nearly did all the crops. My dad did custom work--like baling--at that time. He went out to the Dakotas every fall and baled flat straw. When I went into the service, my dad got into hogs and out of dairying. That lasted maybe four or five years. Then my mother got cancer, and he quit hogs altogether. The farm was just crops, with a little bit of custom work again.

MR: How big a dairy herd did he have when you were working it?

JS: About fifteen or twenty cows is basically what we had. Dad was an old-style farmer. He believed that you couldn't put a milker on some of those cows. You had to milk them by hand. So I always had five or six to milk by hand and did the rest with a bucket. When I left, another brother started milking, and he milked everything with a bucket. He didn't do it part way.

Eventually, my dad got away from the dairy. It had produced a nice check, and I suppose my parents figured that it would keep us busy as well as bring in a check. We quit milking when I got out of school--I think we only had ten or fifteen cows left. My dad also did a little bit of feeding out, but he only did that for a couple of years, and he quit
that, too. He never really was that much into dairy after the kids left, and finally he just quit it all together. That's basically where I learned the work end of it, anyway.

**MR:** Were you involved in FFA [Future Farmers of America] or 4-H?

**JS:** For one year, that's all. I had one year when we lived down by Springfield. When we transferred to Wabasso, they didn't have FFA. I never really got involved in 4-H. My school activities didn't pertain to ag at all. I was just involved in some of the school stuff--like choir--and that was about it. The ag part of school wasn't offered by Wabasso. That school was not big enough to support an ag instructor and they just never had one. They had shop--that's about it.

**MR:** You mentioned that you went into the service. When did you do that?

**JS:** I worked at home for about a year after I graduated. Then came the draft for eighteen year olds at the start of the Vietnam War--when we were more or less getting involved in it. It was mandatory that all eighteen year olds have physicals. Well, I had my physical in June.

Then in November--I think I'll remember that forever. I was calling a friend with whom I had hired out to do field work--baling for neighbors around there. I was calling to find out when they were coming to pick me up. A buddy came running up to me and said, "Ha, ha, you got drafted."

And he wasn't kidding. There was my notice. I left a week later. I was gone.

I went to Leavenworth [Kansas], and from there I went to Fort Belvoir [Virginia]. It was in D.C. that I met Marcy. Then I was transferred to Germany for fifteen months. I enjoyed the service. It was a lot better than I thought it would be.

Another thing about that draft--I was drafted on my dad's birthday. I don't know if that was a present to him or not. At least it was one less to worry about.

Marcy and I were married when I got out of the service. I became a mechanic then, for about ten years. I was a tractor and truck mechanic. I had a skill--I did about everything. We never lived in town. We always stayed out in the country and always lived on a building site. We enjoyed it.

We started raising hogs the second year we were married. My dad gave us two runts that were bred and that weren't going to amount to anything. So I raised them. I think we only had five or six pigs out of those two. Then we got some deer ox and we just kept raising livestock.

We continued that up until the Farm Security program started. When we heard about that we thought, "Let's try it."
Marcy pushed me, too.

I said, "Well, I don't know."

And she said, "Well, you always talk about farming. Just go ahead and try it."

So I said, "Okay, let's go."

Dan Gary was in charge of that program. We called him up, and he helped a lot. He told us where we had to go to find a farm. I don't know how many we looked at—it must have been ten or twelve. Then we found this place here. It was what we were looking for.

I ended up by Watkins, one day, in an airplane. And I don't ever want to do that again! The realtor gave me a ride in an airplane—an older plane. When you sit beside somebody who is cranking something up every once in a while, it makes you nervous. Then we went to look at a farm place he was showing me, from up in the air.

He said, "We'll get a closer look." And he swooped down, turned really sharply, and then fell down really quickly, and went back up.

I thought, "My word, I'm never going to make it."

We were in the plane for probably an hour, or an hour and a half. He had picked me up right after work, and I think we were back by 6:30. It wasn't late at all, and I was really surprised.

But I told Marcy, "Never again. We'll drive from now on!"

Anyway, we started dealing for this place, and it was a long process. We ended up renting it because we couldn't get it purchased right away. Then I bought two herds of cattle. We got a loan through a local bank and that was a surprise to me. It was for $55,000, I think. At the time, I didn't expect a bank would go that far for anybody.

We had gone to FmHA [Farmers Home Administration], Production Credit Association [PCA], and a bank. The bank didn't want to do anything at first. Then we went to PCA, and you had to buy stock along with their loan. With the debt I was looking at, I couldn't see paying $8,000 or $10,000 more on a loan that would be hard to pay back anyway.

**MS:** We didn't really want to borrow through PCA either, because we weren't farming yet.

**JS:** Yes, and we didn't have the experience. All I had done was hogs. Well, then I went to FmHA, and the loan wasn't big enough. I would need to borrow $100,000 or $110,000.
I said, "No."

I felt we could do it for $55,000. So Marcy went to the bank. She had to do all the running because I was still working as a mechanic for an implement dealer. She would tell me what happened and then I'd tell her, "Okay, let's do this."

And then she would run and do it.

The bank officer told her that if nobody else would do it, "I'll give you the loan."

I thought that was nice. I'd been a customer at that bank for maybe ten or fifteen years, but we never had a lot of money to put into it. I later found out that the banker had sold the bank. He was leaving that fall, so it didn't make much difference to him--"let the new banker take care of it."

We had an understanding to the point where we felt we could get the deal through. I had spoken for two herds--forty-one head of cattle. One herd was only a mile from where we were living. They were all heifers. The owners kept calling me, asking when I was going to pick up the cattle. I was calling the fellow who owned this place, trying to get the deal locked down. I couldn't do it. So finally I said, "The only thing we can do right now is to rent the farm. If you could rent it to us for a year, we'll keep trying to get into this [Farm Security] program."

I kept trying to push the fact that the owner would get tax-free money from the program. Also there was no down payment--which would have helped us because we had no money. We were even, and that was it.

The owner finally agreed to that arrangement. We paid rent and got the cattle moved. We farmed for two weeks by Redwood Falls because the owner hadn't moved out yet. So I had to run back and forth. Finally a cow calved, and I had to milk. We brought in a portable unit, and I was milking her that way for about a week. Then one day the owner said, "We've got to move. We aren't doing you any justice doing this way. We've got a place all bought. We'll move."

Well, the owner had pigeons and he didn't move them right away. They were down in the hog barn. We moved the cattle and furniture and everything, but I fed the hogs down at the other place and I had to drive twenty or twenty-two miles to get there. One day we had a storm that threw snow everywhere. I couldn't get two miles down the road, and naturally I couldn't get down there that day. When I got there the next day, a couple of the pigs were dead. The people who were living in that place hadn't even thought of looking at the pigs. At least they didn't look. I can't say anything more about it, but we moved the hogs up here. But the owner still had his pigeons in a little shack that he had built. My sows got out one night and took care of part of his shack. He moved those pigeons that week! He said, "It's my problem. I shouldn't have done this. I'll get the birds out."
And he did. He was good that way. So finally we got things straightened out, and then we started farming. We put in a lot of hours.

We sent an application to Farm Security five times. The fifth time we went there ourselves. In the meantime, land prices started getting higher. They were high enough the way it was, but they were going higher. We had just rented forty acres from the guy who sold us this farm. We rented because we couldn't get it under contract. Then the owner started talking like he wanted more money and more interest. Dan Gary talked to him and got him back to the original price. Then the state took a portion of the farm and said, "Well, go with this part of it. It looks like it will cash flow."

So we ended up going up to the offices of the program and personally talked with the board before we finally got the deal through. Dan worked with us a lot. The state worked with us a lot. I really appreciated that. It really helped.

We started milking, and prices went higher and higher. We started falling behind. At that time, we were paying $46,000 every year. The state would pay $16,000. I think we started out paying $30,000.

**MS:** They paid the interest on it at first.

**JS:** Yes, the interest came to $16,000. That's what it was. It began to get hard, and then it was impossible. I always felt that we should have fifty cows milking and farrow forty hogs. We had forty sows, but it got to be too much work. There was just too much for everybody to handle. And we were running out of room.

I think if it weren't that the basement was full of kids, we would have put livestock down there. We kept calves there sometimes, but everybody does that. When they got chilled, we would thaw them out in the basement. The next morning, the calves would be standing up again. They would go right back out as long as they were dry.

It was getting to be too much. I couldn't keep up with it. Marcy would help a lot, but we couldn't manage even with both of us doing it. We hung on as long as we could. Then the mediation program started, and we went into mediation and worked with our farm advocate. I talked to the county agent, and he told us what we should be doing. First we went to a farm advocate and explained the situation to him. He would run the computer on the FIN PAK, a computerized financial planning program offered by the extension service, but we had been doing that for years. You can work those budgets to death and they don't do anything at the end of the year. It just gives you an idea of where you should be. It doesn't mean anything when the weather doesn't cooperate. I think Marcy has seen figures coming out of her ears. Sometimes I would stay outside doing a little more chores, just so I wouldn't have to come in and work on those figures. There's a lot of figures and records to keep up.
Anyway, we went into mediation. We had a mediator who helped us a lot when Farm Security and FmHA came in. Those were our two biggest creditors. We felt we could get to the other ones, in time. Mediation really was nice. We still had to do a lot of records, a lot of computer work--FIN PAKs and cash flows and everything else--but they worked with you, and that's one thing I'll say about the state--they did work. We made some proposals as to what we could do. They wanted us to buy them out, and I didn't feel we could. Then FmHA changed some of their conditions. They exchanged some loans, and brought some interest payments down. They worked with us well. We couldn't complain. If we had a problem, we'd go in and talk to them about it. They'd listen to us and together we'd try to figure out something. It came out nicely.

In the end, we bought the farm back. FmHA picked up the contract, but with a more realistic figure. But first Marcy and I had to go and check the appraisal of farms in our area that had already been sold.

We looked at ten farms--just drove around for a couple of days and compared our property with theirs. Then we came up with what we thought was a fair market value. It was fair, but compared with what land was going for, it was unrealistic. Then the state came up with a figure. They said, "This is what we feel we've got to have."

We took that back to FmHA and ran some more cash flows and did some more figuring. They appraised our place and did our notes over and accepted a contract. But, you know, as for working with FmHA and the state, I've got nothing bad to say about it. It really did work. That includes everybody--all our creditors. I had just one creditor that was a little snippy.

**MS:** I think they appreciated our being honest with them. We haven't had any problems.

**JS:** Yes, you've got to show that you are trying. We've got 200 acres out here. We've got forty-five cows milking and thirty sows farrowing. I feel that if we can't make it on that, then it isn't going to work, period. Because everything that comes off the farm is all for the farm. But it takes a lot of time. I feel you've got to diversify to make things work. If I figured on doing only crop, I would have to have some money in my back pocket. That would be fine. But you can't do it if you don't diversify. You can't be an expert in one field and start farming like we did and expect to make it. You've got to diversify. If one project goes down, you need to have something else to pick up. That's what we've done. But it's hard. It takes an awful lot of time.

As for activities that our kids are involved in--either Marcy or I go to them. Mostly Marcy, if I can get her to drive the kids to where they need to be. Sometimes she'll take over my job on the farm and then I'll go for awhile. But usually we don't both go, unless it's really late at night.

**MS:** We made it to some basketball games.
**JS:** Yes. My daughter played.

**MS:** I remember when our daughter was in a basketball game. We got there for the last eighteen seconds, so we got to see her.

**JS:** We'd catch the last quarter once in a while. I saw her make one basket. That's probably the only basket she made all year, but I saw it. It was in the last quarter and I thought, "Well, that was worth the whole thing."

Now we've got another daughter playing softball. Marcy has been able to see some games, but it's hard.

**MS:** They just started Tuesday. I saw that one.

**JS:** When I was a mechanic, I used to coach a girls' softball team, and I loved it. We're trying to see that kids have a chance to be involved. Maybe we should be leaning on the kids a little more, but we aren't. They've got their responsibilities. One of the girls takes care of the pig feeder barn, running the feed bin and checking and keeping water in the tank. The hose is right there. Another one takes care of a couple of calves--feeds them and her cats at night. The boy will be starting chores pretty soon.

**MS:** He's got his rats.

**JS:** Yes, and as he gets a little more antsy, he might start chores sooner than we think. But kids still need to get involved. The farm's tying Marcy and me down, but it isn't tying the kids down. They need to live their own lives.

We've got an older boy in electronics. He was never really interested in farming. He was good at what he did, but wasn't interested in the dairying, and I never pushed him on it.

We've got a girl now at Mankato State. She's in mass communications. She probably gets that interest from me--talking all the time. That field doesn't pertain the farming, but it's something she wanted to do. This farm is something we wanted to do.

**MS:** One thing we left out about our start in farming is that about a year before we came here, Jim's mother died. There were still three boys at home yet, and those younger brothers came to live with us.

**JS:** For three years.

**MS:** So at one time we had...

**JS:** ...Eight kids...

**MS:** ...Eight kids, right. Five of our own plus those three.
JS: I bought an old station wagon. It smoked oil from the day I bought it. We needed a bigger car, so we bought it. We've still got that bugger. We can't get rid of it. Nobody wants it. But this year it'll be gone.

MS: So for a while there, we went through a lot. We started farming, and we had three extra kids, and it was just a hassle.

JS: Dad was on his own more or less. He wasn't around that much.

MS: He still did a lot of custom work.

JS: He was doing custom work and away from home. The kids couldn't live by themselves, so we ended up with my three brothers. It wasn't easy.

MS: His youngest brother is only three months older than our oldest son. You try to go to school and explain it's nephew and uncle, not brothers. It was a difficult time.

JS: It was hard, too, trying to balance things out.

MS: And those two never did get along. They were in the same class in school and had fights. It got to where it was better to stay out in the barn doing chores rather than to come in the house.

JS: Quieter, yes. Livestock may be dumb, but they don't come back and scream at you all the time.

But with farming--you've got something going all the time. That's what's nice about what I've been doing. I like mechanic work, but I like farming, too. Even if my boy wanted to go into farming, I think I would have suggested doing what he's doing--something else first. That way he could see what it's like to have time off or the kind of vacation where you can spend a week or two weeks away from home and not have to worry about getting back. I feel that if the guy is farming, he should let his kids get away from the farm and let them have a chance to do something else. Then let them come back.

MS: And you have to realize that kids have bills sometimes, too. You may think that they don't have anything to spend their money on, but they have needs, too.

JS: There's a lot of time involved in farming. Even as small a farm as we are. We spend eight, ten, twelve hours a day just with the livestock. Then when there's spring work or fall work, you've got maybe six or eight hours left to eat and sleep.

MS: You don't get any time to oversleep.
JS: You barely have time to eat and sleep and maybe watch some TV. It takes a lot of time, if you want to farm. I don't think a person can step in and pay $1,000 or $1,200 an acre for land and then expect everything to be all clear so he can take off in the fall. You can't do that because there are creditors at the other end waiting for their money. If you think you're justified in buying the land for that price, you'd better be justified in making sure that the loan is paid. But it's awful hard.

Marcy's gone east to see her mother--to Pennsylvania, where Marcy is originally from. And her mother comes out every year for a couple of weeks. But Marcy has only gone there twice in ten years. She went with Jimmy one year, and then one year to her sister's wedding.

MS: I flew out with...

JS: ...Eight kids...

MS: ...No, Randy didn't go.

JS: Okay, seven kids.

MS: I had seven kids on a plane with me. The youngest one was six months old. It was in the winter time, and Pittsburgh was snowbound. We ended up in Philadelphia. The pilot was fantastic. He helped with the suitcases, which the kids thought was great. We got a motel. We went sightseeing in Philadelphia the next day. Here I am standing on a street corner, getting a cab with all these kids.

JS: When you're farming, you sort of take advantage of any changes you can get. So you went to this wedding. Ma called and asked where you were. That's the first time I knew you that you hadn't made it to Pittsburgh. I thought, "My God, she took off with the kids and nobody knows where she is?"

MS: We were still in the air so we couldn't call. But it all worked out. We ended up getting to sightsee in Philadelphia. Then we made it back to Pittsburgh a day later, just in time for my sister's wedding. I wouldn't want to try it again.

JS: That's right. And Ma, once in a while, sends some money so one of the kids can visit her during the summer. That's nice, because they can get away to see some of their cousins and aunts and Grandma. Grandma's good, and that part is really nice.

Myself, I would love to go, too. But, if you leave, you worry about something happening at home to the cattle. If you've got one that gets mastitis or if she's got trouble with calves or if people have trouble milking or something, you're scared. You think maybe the cattle will break down, and you will lose them. A cow can be dead in a day, if you don't catch a problem right away. Dairymen are always feeling if she has a hard quarter, if she isn't milking or eating quite right. You worry whether someone else will notice it. If you were
to sell that cow, she's probably worth $300, $400 or $500, but if you're milking that cow, she's worth $1,500. It's what you miss out of that.

**MS:** Last year, Jim was a farm delegate. He had to fly to a meeting in Wisconsin. He wasn't going to go because he had to leave at six in the morning and wouldn't be back until seven that night. He was worried about chores...

**JS:** ...I was.

**MS:** We kept saying, "We can handle it."

The night before he left, we were still going through this argument. He had to go, and finally he went.

**JS:** I started the milking.

**MS:** And we got it done, didn't we?

**JS:** Yes, you did make it.

**MS:** And you also went to Stewartville. That was another time. The buildings were still standing when you got back?

**JS:** Yes, the cows were there.

**MS:** The milking inspector was due in a week, and the girls and I got the barn all cleaned up. He didn't think we'd get it done.

**JS:** When she takes over though, I kind of step cautiously in the building, because once in a while a cow gets kicking, and the cow and her temper come up about the same time.

And I'll say, "Now, just take it easy."

If she's mad, then I go out the other door.

**MS:** When I get kicked, I'm ready to get rid of that cow.

**JS:** Yes. We could load up a lot of cows in a very short time. I keep telling her, "Well, one more year and we'll get a heifer in there, and replace her."

Then that cow does a little better, and we'll say, "Well, maybe I can milk that sucker, and maybe Marcy can plow."
It works out all right. But you've got to juggle things. You don't have a lot of free time. That's the bad part of farming. Marcy--she's after me to get away. And you do have to get away from it sometimes.

**MS:** His free time is right in front of the TV set.

**JS:** Yes, I'm too tired. I don't want to go unless we get a nice start. I keep the cows on a schedule. I get up at 4:00 a.m., and maybe I'll get in at 7:45 or 8:00 a.m. Then at night, we start milking at 4 p.m., and we finish at 7:30 or 8:00, depending upon how things go. Sometimes you get a cow that's calving. Trying to do it that way helps a little bit at night once in a while. If I know we are going to go someplace, I don't do as much during noon or I take a nap. Then I'm ready to go.

Sometimes when I'm out in the field, Marcy will take over for me and I'll come in and milk. That gets me off the tractor, and I can halfway doze while I'm milking. You hear the milk because you know when that cow's ready. And if she's jumpy, you're awake. I mean, you've got no problem falling asleep milking. So that's nice.

As for the hogs--if I had to farm without dairy, I don't think we would really be able to do it, because there is so much disease. I decided when I started farming that I should get into the hardest thing there is, because people won't want to jump in and take it away from you--something that you're going to fight all the time, anyway.

Land is easy. The way the equipment is, you have to fight everybody to hang on to it. When you start milking a cow, there aren't as many people around who want to do that kind of work. They'll stay away from you. I felt we had a better chance by getting a milk check every month. Even if you already owe it somewhere, it's nice to get that check. And maybe you can still do something with it. Very little, but something. So that's why we looked at a dairy farm--that was basically the reason.

**MS:** I was raised on a dairy farm, too, but I didn't milk the cows like Jim did.

**JS:** So this farm took her back to dairying. She was a secretary for FFA in D.C. for two years, and I took her away from that. She keeps reminding me about it, and I keep kicking myself because she would have been there over twenty years now. She could be retired and we could be milking now, probably at a better income.

They offered me a job, but I didn't take it, like a dummy. I just wanted to be out in the country. I wanted to be away.

We moved in here on our anniversary. The furnace quit that night--it ran out of fuel--and I thought, "This is really something to remember." I didn't know anybody around here.

**MS:** We slept in our overalls, all bundled up.
**JS:** That's the way to start.

**MR:** Was that an omen?

**JS:** It was an omen. Things got bad to worse.

**MS:** It was late at night before we realized it was getting awful cold in here.

**JS:** The furnace didn't kick in. I didn't know anything about furnaces, but I was educated fast. I found out that the tank was empty. I didn't know who to call. The guy I bought the place from had told me whom he got his fuel from, so I thought, "Well, we'll get it from those guys to start."

We got the truck out the next day to make a delivery. What a way to start. I had cows calving and, boy, did I get an education from those heifers. There were a couple that had mastitis in all four quarters. They got sick on me and didn't milk. I was ready to pull my hair out there for a while. Then I got a little more adjusted to it.

One thing I realized when we first started milking, as compared to the milking I did as a kid, is that there is a big difference between the animals at that time and now. They produce so much more now. We could get away with a lot more with cows years ago then we can now. Now the cow is just a milking machine. You've got to do so much more to keep her going. That first year, I didn't realize how much it took to get her going, but boy, we found out that there were a lot of things.

Then things started to gel a little bit. We have made money off the cattle. We put a lot of work into it, but we've had a lot of returns from the cattle, too. It's kept us going. Whether good or bad, I couldn't say. But it's kept us going.

I have always liked hogs. I think if Marcy had her way she would sell them all, too. We'd be going to Florida a lot in the fall, wouldn't we?

**MS:** We could do some things that I want to do.

**JS:** I know. There are a lot of things we can't do because of the work that must be done here.

We've cut back on sows, and that helped a lot. We had twelve or fourteen sows farrowing a month, which doesn't seem like a lot, but when you've room for only ten, it's a lot. Especially when you're milking cows, because you've got eight hours a day tied up in just those buggers. But we cut back the number of sows, and we haven't had as many problems with the pigs.

**MS:** We have more time to spend with them.
JS: Yes, we've changed a few things around. You can do more things with the hogs. We've made a little more room by having fewer sows to fill that spot up, and that's helped.

I moved a building over, maybe the third year we were here. I didn't have any hay or straw storage, so we were looking for a hayloft building. After we moved the building, we put feeder pigs and butchers in the bottom and split them up. Boy, did that work nicely. Actually, this is the first year that we've been able to buy new feeders. We've always bought used feeders, but this year we bought new ones. And I thought, "That's got to be a step up." Even the feed man is proud to open those lids up now to put feed in there.

We don't grind our own feed. I've got somebody doing that for me. It's a business in town, and it helps because it gives me more time to do other things. It costs, but it saves. I think it saves me more than it costs, because I don't have to worry about the grain. It's nice to just pick it up there and haul it out.

Instead of ripping trees out, we've been planting trees. We are even thinking of making a pond some day. The way the water rights are now, you can hardly touch a wetlands if you haven't been doing something to it for the last ten or twenty or thirty years. So I feel if we can't change it, let's make it more pleasant to look at, instead of just a hole. So that's something we're thinking of--putting trees in and a pond.

MS: Our farm is the lowest one in the area, and in the spring that area is usually all water. We're the last one to drain. So we thought it would be nice to have a pond in the yard. Everybody else is getting ready to plant, and we've still got almost a pond out there.

JS: Maybe it helps being a dairyman because you have to have patience. Others are out planting, and I've got to wait two weeks for the ground to be dry enough to go out. If we get a good rain, I'll stand on the road and watch it run from my neighbor's field into mine and then stop. Then that night there'll be some swans and mallards swimming out there.

MS: Yes, there were twenty-one swans this spring.

JS: That doesn't help me much in the spring. The feed man is an outdoorsman. He loves to sit and talk about some of this stuff. It's nice. I didn't buy this farm because I felt I'd make the money off the land. The way things were going, I knew I wouldn't make money off the land because of the kind of ground we've got. I knew I would have trouble.

But I felt that the cattle and hogs should pull us up. I didn't think that both of those would be down at one time. Once in a while they were, but the economy seemed to always come back. I felt we could survive and make it, but I was diversifying. That's the only way I'd ever farm--to diversify. I'm not an expert in any one thing, and that's the way I like to be. It's too much to study.
It has worked out all right. I can't complain. But it took a lot. It took a county agent—
talking to him helped. Our financing was the big thing. Talking to the people if you had a
bill or an account that was overdue. You had to explain the situation and say, "This is
what I've got. This is how I plan on doing it."

If it didn't work, you had to go back and explain it again--why the debt didn't get paid.
But I've had no problems with the people I've dealt with. Like I say, there was maybe one
instance in which I've had a little bit of static, but we got it worked out. I had another
place to go for help to correct the problem; we changed things around a little bit and kept
going. The biggest thing was just to lock in the financing and get it so we could cash flow
a little bit better.

**MS:** And the man they have at FmHA now is really good.

**JS:** Yes, the personnel kept changing at FmHA pretty fast there, for a while. However,
that's one thing that I can say. For as many people as we ran through at FmHA, we never
had any hard feelings with any of them.

**MS:** This is the best one that we've had. We got along with all of them, but this is the best
one.

**JS:** FmHA knew they had a problem. We had to realize that FmHA had a lot of debt to
write off, and we had to work something out. They're in there to make money, too, and to
do it at a lower interest so that farmers can keep going. It seems like a lot of people didn't
see that. They seemed to feel that, "We're over our head. We can't get out. Either you
forgive that debt, or you can have it."

It just doesn't work that way. You've got to come to a realistic figure.

We paid interest and sat on some of that principal, and had it written down to where we
could cash flow it. It doesn't have to be written off--just write it down and give us an
interest rate we can work with until things get better. Hopefully, the economy will stay
this way for a while. Maybe it won't, but as far as I'm concerned, as long as you can keep
paying your accounts and your bills, you are making it.

The thing is, you've got to leave a little more time to relax, too. We haven't been doing
that, but we're getting better. I had one neighbor tell me that after five years, everything
was going to be rosy. He went broke. He went broke, and we were getting in deeper.

So I thought, "Well, maybe things will change after ten years."

Then this mediation program came up, and it did help. I used to tell Marcy that the real
reason they didn't shut us down was because there's so damn much work out here, they'd
be crazy to come out and do all of it. As long as you've got someone foolish enough to do
it, let him do it. Let him alone. But then things got straightened out.
Wayne Martsoff, who works for the Farm Security program, worked with us. Dean Hanson did a lot. Dean was good. He looked at the situation and said, "I can see what you're doing. I can see what you're trying to do. We know what you've done with the money. There's no problem. We realize that things are way out of line."

So it really helped. That's one good thing I've got to say, that with all the trouble that's been around, we've been able to stay out of it. But we've had an understanding, and that helps. It helps a lot.

The other thing that really helps is having a wife who really cracks on the books. That's a good thing, I suppose--I married a secretary. She likes figures.

MS: If it were up to him, there would be no records--none whatsoever.

JS: Thirty-four years later, we'd still be milking like crazy and at the end of the year--if we were still here--we made money. That would be about it.

MS: We probably wouldn't even have a shoebox of receipts.

JS: Probably not. I don't buy too many shoes. We buy a lot of used stuff. If something looks halfway decent and if it looks like we can make it work, we use it. If we make any money, we'll stick it in whatever is needed most--we try to repair as much as possible before replacing things. That's basically what we're doing.

We haven't bought cattle. I don't buy them. I don't buy hogs. I just try to improve on what I've got. The bulls were all AI [artificial insemination]. We don't use any bulls on this place. It's strictly AI bulls and that helped. We've got a good technician. He's been terrific.

The neighbors have been good. I've got a neighbor who lives a few miles from me. If I don't have room to be feeding steers, he'll give me a fair price on them. I've got a pit in there. He bought a new pump, and he let me use the old pump. He doesn't want to sell it. He said, "You just keep it running and you can use it."

MS: ...He's got a place to keep it, too.
JS: Yes, he's got a shed and I don't have a shed to put it in. Well, he's open now and then if I need a blower I'll holler, and he'll come over and blow my yard out. That's what I like about farming. That's what it should be like. I've got a cultivator down the road. This year he put everything in alfalfa, so I don't know what he's going to borrow--probably the hay racks.

That's another thing. There are two sons and a dad farming together down the road, with 100 to 120 head of cattle. I've got five hay racks. They've got three, four, or five racks. If all their racks are in use, they will come over here and use my racks for maybe a week and then bring them back. And that's terrific. You don't have to put out the outlay. We've got twenty-five acres of alfalfa and Marcy and I can bale maybe four to six racks, but we don't have time to unload them. We've got to do them in the morning after milking, and we have chores at night. We can go over there and get a rack or two if we need one--or three or four--if they aren't using them.

And that works. It's great. It helps. That's farming the way it's supposed to be. You're supposed to help each other. You aren't supposed to grab this or that.

If a neighbor's got problems, you don't say, "Well, he isn't going to make it, so I'll buy that land." You go over there and say, "Well, maybe we can help you with this."

You don't have to put cash out, but maybe could help him do a little bit of this or that. And that helps. It helps a lot.

MS: Once a guy from FmHA came around, doing inventory. He came here and Jim said, "And I've got a snowblower down here, and I've got an auger over there."

Then the FmHA guy went down to the neighbor, and the neighbor said the same thing, "Well, I've got a cultivator here, My tractor's over there."

I thought, "That poor guy is attempting to find everybody's equipment which is scattered everywhere."

JS: I have a wagon in the barn at my dad's place. He went back into farming, so I have a wagon down there.

MS: You have some of your dad's stuff out here, too.

JS: Yes, a lot of it. Dad likes to go to sales and pick up something cheap. There's usually a reason for it being cheap, but he doesn't think that way. We'll wait until the season comes in and we'll resell it. Sometimes it comes out right, sometimes it doesn't. I've got three or four things sitting out there that just aren't going to be sold. So I've got to tell the FmHA guy, "That's Dad's. Don't worry about it. That's not mine."

So he says, "Okay."
That's another thing about FmHA--and maybe it is the hard part. You've got to report what you are going to do. I know one guy who bought a lot of stuff without reporting it, and that summer he sold out. He quit. He did it all on his own, too. Good or bad, I don't know. But we've had no problems on reporting. Usually, if you need a loan, you get your plan all set up before you tell FmHA. You tell them how it's going to work and how you have it in your plan, and then you're okay. So that part of it hasn't been bad.

This FmHA guy's been great, I tell you. He understands farming, and that's a big thing. A lot of these guys throw figures around and compute them. They may be really good on the numbers, but they don't understand what it's all about. We've had a couple of them. It makes it hard, because then you have to go back in there and explain it, and then change it, and then start all over again. It takes FmHA a while to approve a loan, anyway. And then if you've got somebody who doesn't really understand farming, it really takes a while. By that time, it may be a year. If you can explain to the creditor that the loan is coming from FmHA, they'll usually be more understanding.

It's an education. It's all part of farming. And we've been farming about ten years now.

**MR:** When did you go into mediation? What year was that?

**JS:** That was last year.

**MS:** Last fall.

**JS:** We turned the farm back the year before.

**MS:** Mediation didn't start until August.

**JS:** Yes. At that time we really got into the mediation and FmHA got involved. FmHA had to get involved because there were just too many farms in trouble out here.

We worked with some good people. Tom Booker, the Renville County extension agent, did a lot. He helped us on a lot of things. We threw figures at them, and they threw figures back. The price we sent to Farm Security for the property was computed with FmHA and with the extension service looking at it--what we could get out of it, what it was worth, what we had to do to it. I talked to tilers, too, because FmHA was using figures for land that was tiled. We aren't tiled that well. We've only done a few hundred feet. But that figure should be used in computing a price for this property, because if you're going to price my property against some that's been tiled, you better figure the right comparison. So that helped. It brought down that land value figure a lot. FmHA understood what I was looking at.

We took pictures of the spring rains, when we used to have about twenty acres of water out there and ducks swimming all over. I had corn up. There was a time when we had rain
every blasted year, about July 5th or 7th. This farm is low, and I lived here in seven of
probably the wettest years in history. I would say, "This is really what I need."

The crop would drown. I'd have corn standing in water and I'd keep saying, "Only a week. Just only a week."

And it would be two weeks, and the corn would be dead, gone. So then I'd dig it up and put beans in there, but the ground was too wet and alkaline and I wouldn't get any beans. So I just plain started putting corn back, and we'd use it for silage. That's worked better.

Like I say, Marcy and I fought that every year, but it doesn't make any difference. If it's going to rain, it's going to rain.

I had one neighbor who was going to help me. He's a big operator. I think highly of this guy. He was going to combine my beans--I had maybe fifteen acres. I said, "There isn't enough out there to combine. Just forget it."

Well, since he kept his combine here, he felt he had to return the favor. So he said, "I'll go get them."

I said, "You can't get out there."

He went out in the field and sunk the combine. He came back and said, "I guess you're right."

We'd had seven or eight wet years, so I understood. I thanked him--I appreciated that he had put in the effort. But that was the last year we put beans on this place.

We've started with oats now because we need the straw. I've been running all over looking for straw. The combines are changing. You get into rotary combines now, and they are a lot finer stemmed and it's harder to bale the straw. So we started putting in ten to fifteen acres of oats. Maybe we will put in a little more later on, I don't know. But right now, there are only ten to fifteen acres.

I keep looking at the work load. If you can get the crops closer to home, you can get a lot more done. If you get farther away, then it's harder to get things done.

**MR:** Do you think a lot of the people who got in trouble during this time were people like you, just victims of bad timing?

**JS:** Some of them were, but a lot of the problem was greed--the idea that things were cash flowing so well. One year we had corn at three dollars a bushel and land went up like crazy. That can't be justified--it doesn't justify it.
I've talked to people who claimed that they'd never farm if they had to do more than crop farming. They better wake up because their crop is going to be sold, and the only way we are going to get it exported is if we are competitive with other nations. Other nations have got cheap labor. Now where are we going to justify cheap labor? There isn't going to be cheap labor any more, not around here. So you've got to come down someplace else.

Equipment is higher. If you're going to pay the price, you're going to have to charge it. Then you look back on land. They feel the equipment will help them do a better job of farming it, so they can afford a little more. But we've got to have the rains. We've got to have the weather for it, and we've got to have the market. You can keep a crop sitting in bins for two or three years waiting for four dollar a bushel corn, but that four dollar corn hasn't come yet.

I think the economy is doing the same thing again. We aren't being realistic about things. You can handle only so much. Let's enjoy the land and farm it, but let's not try to farm everything around. Your neighbors are going to disappear. You're going to dry up your towns because you get so big that you can make more money if you truck it up to the Twin Cities. Fine, but if you truck it up to the Cities, but your town will be gone. All of a sudden, you look around and there won't be anybody around anymore. It's strictly because you haven't stopped to realize that there are other people out here. You've got to farm just what you can handle and enjoy it. That's the thing. That's what I feel.

MS: A lot of farmers also felt that farming owed them so much. They would be a little dishonest in their dealings just to get their own way. Quite a few things happened that way. There are loopholes in too many things. Farmers can get around them. There are a lot of people getting help who should not be getting it. But that's true of anything, I guess.

MR: So people were taking advantage of the system?

JS: Yes. That's what we felt. Maybe if there weren't so many loopholes in some of this tax stuff--just let them pay taxes for what they get. You save "X" amount of dollars in order to survive and you have to have "X" amount of dollars more. Then anything over that, pay the tax. Don't get the equipment to use as a tax write-off. There's a lot of equipment out there that farmers didn't need, but which they bought to use as tax write-offs. Then farmers turned around and rented some more land to justify having the equipment. It doesn't work that way.

The banker even told me, when I first started, "You've got so much land, and you've got this amount of horsepower. That's all you need."

And it is. That's all you really need. You don't have to have a new tractor every five years or whatever. So maybe the tractor needs repairs. Get it repaired and run it again. What's a matter with it? As long as you take care of what you've got--sooner or later, it will wear out, of course--but it will last a lot longer if you take care of it.
I talked to one guy who used to be a parts man. I asked him what he thought about the fact that land prices are doing the same thing this year they did a few years back--that land is coming back.

I said, "What's going on?"

He said, "I hate to say it, but there's a lot of dumb farmers out there."

I'm not going to say that they are dumb, but they're not stopping to realize what's going on here. They just don't realize it, or if they do, they don't want to admit it. With all this mediation and getting all this debt straightened out, they turn around and pay more for rent than they did before the debt. That isn't justifying anything; they aren't doing anything to improve their situation. But maybe they're showing their ignorance. They're just doing the same thing over and over again, thinking somebody will come and pick them up again. Sooner or later, that somebody is going to say, "Hey, we can't do this anymore."

Farmers like us are in the minority. There aren't that many people out here doing what we're doing. I just can't see things being corrected unless farmers realize that there is nobody out there to help them anymore. Farmers have to do things themselves, instead of the government stepping in. Maybe that's the only way you're going to keep farmers on the farm.

MR: Do you think farmers have to be more conscious of marketing and commodity prices?

JS: I suppose if you're strictly grain farming, yes, because that market fluctuates a lot. If you are farming the amount of ground that we're farming, the fifty or sixty cents difference isn't going to matter because everything will balance out. If you're running a couple of thousand acres and you've got a fifty cent drop, that's a big difference. You're farming that 2,000 acres and you're not diversified, so you don't have other things to back you up.

We are only going to get so much for that crop. You've got to sell it or feed it--one or the other. If you haven't got a place to feed it, then you've got to sell it. The only way you're going to sell it is to do it cheap. That's the only way we are going to be competitive if we want to export things. Somebody else has to buy it, and if they feel that the price isn't what they want to pay for it, they aren't going to pay it.

I don't know why. I'm a diversified farmer, and that's the way I feel we should be--diversified. I don't feel that we can be an expert in only one area. You can be an expert and improve your production, but you still have to sell the crop. If you've stuck more into it then somebody else, then you've got to get more out of it. The market dictates that. That's about all I can really say about that.
MR: Has the community around here changed in the time that you've been here?

JS: It has changed a lot, yes. Some of our businesses feel that you've got to be big in order to survive. You don't have to be big. You can buy things together and spread it out. But they feel that you've got to draw so much grain in the elevators. You don't have to draw all that grain in. You've got feed departments. You've got chemical departments.

I think we should buy the product wholesale at the best price available and service the customer. They haven't done that. They feel like, "We've got a railroad here, so let's export it to there. Well, if this railroad isn't working, let's go up north farther where there's a bigger railroad. We can go someplace and we can get rid of that grain."

It's still going to cost you to ship it up there. But you aren't looking around to see the customer out there--the one who has to bring that stuff in.

A volume farmer, like I say, isn't going to sell his grain down here if he can get fifteen or twenty cents more trucking it himself. He's going to do it himself. But the guy who isn't running quite as much will look at that board price, too. Maybe if he's got some grain to sell, he'll sell it to you, if you're out there talking to him.

It has changed. We've lost a couple of businesses in town.

MS: The grocery store and the hardware store are selling out now.

JS: The elevator isn't much at all. The gas station was sold. It was going to be a private business from the way it sounded. The co-op from another town came in and bid on it. They said the other members from the old co-op wanted us to bid it in. What's the difference if the station wanted to be private or they want to be a co-op? Let them go private as long as the business is going to stay in town. Let them try it, and if it doesn't work, then let the co-op buy it. Let the people have a chance to keep the business in town. Now it's the only station in town and some people are going to have to buy gas there. But the bulk business is gone because the co-op didn't feel comfortable with it. It wasn't comfortable with the business.

The only way you're going keep a town surviving is to do business in that town. But if we keep taking our business out and then say, "Well, we've bought this now, you've got to do business with us"--you aren't going to get business. People will go someplace else. That's what is happening now.

MR: Are places like Willmar and Hutchinson providing a lot of competition--for example, people shopping for groceries at Cash Wise?

JS: Cash Wise took some, I think. Marcy knows more than I do about grocery shopping...

MS: ...I'd say yes, because you look at the cheaper prices and you naturally go there.
JS: And our implement dealers are starting to realize that some of the business is gone. They are coming out with new incentives now. Some of the implement businesses--like where I used to work--have had the owners' sons take over. They started off where their dads left off, with the business in good shape. But they don't realize that you've got to work with the customers--you've got to talk to them and you've more or less got to cater to them a little bit. If you want to get your price, you've got to give something, too. It can't always be the customer giving. These owners are getting away from that. Some of your bigger implement dealers--well, they got volume. They'll cut the price down a little bit, and they'll talk to you. I've had them call. They are looking for business, which is what they've got to do.

I know we are going to lose more businesses. You can see it. There are more businesses disappearing. It's a shame.

MR: You don't farm that many acres, but do you see people more worried about pesticide use and environmental pollution?

JS: Yes, you see a lot more concern, especially about groundwater. I should say that you see people more concerned, but I don't see as many farming as if they're concerned. I've seen groves go down that should have stayed. I've seen fence lines being ripped up that should have stayed. They may say that they are concerned, but they don't really act as if they're concerned yet. Sooner or later, they are going to have to act like they're concerned about these chemicals.

I always felt that chemical use should have been checked a long time ago. You can farm a lot of ground if you use chemicals. But if you read the warnings on the labels, you've got to realize there are problems with these chemicals, and they aren't as controllable once you get it in the ground as maybe you'd like. Maybe the weather changes or something like that, and you don't have the same control. I see more problems with chemical use. I really do.

MR: Are people worried that the government will clamp down on them? The state legislature has been talking about making the laws more stringent.

JS: I don't know. Yes, maybe the regulations on our chemicals will become stricter. On other issues, I think farmers are more worried that the government is going to get out of the farming business. A lot of people farm the government. They don't farm the land. You get the property, you own it, and then the government pays you so much to lay part of the land aside.

MR: It seems as if everyone has his or her own concept of family farming. What is family farming to you?
**JS:** Family farming to me is a husband and wife and family working on the land. That's the way I feel. If something happens, one partner or the other is there to pick you up, to keep you going. It's a cooperative where we get all our income from the same place, where we all have got to do our part to get it--that's what I think family farming is. You take pride in what you're doing--whether it's me out with the cows or it's Marcy with the house or the lawn. That's what I consider family farming.

**MS:** These big farming corporations owned by one family with all those employees under them--that's not family farming.

**JS:** No. We could sure use an employee. We can't afford one, but we can still survive and keep going. I figure that's family farming. Family farming is doing your business in your local community. You don't go sixty miles away to pick up something. You do it in town or in the general area.

Family farming is where you've got a neighbor who comes over and helps you out, and you help him, back and forth. You don't expect money for it. You could freeze your behind pushing him out one day, and then the next day he's at your place, helping you cultivate or plow.

Where everybody helps each other and you don't worry about the dollar end of it, that's what I think family farming is. You just help out. That's what I feel like it is.

**MR:** Is family farming still viable--will it continue in the future? Some people are worried that corporate farming will take over.

**JS:** I don't know if corporate farming is going to take over. I keep thinking about a commercial hog operation I know of--there is a volume of hogs, a lot of hogs, but the hogs always come up with a disease. Sooner or later, you're going to have some kind of disease there. A family farm can clean out and quit for a couple of months and then keep going and start up again. A corporation can't do that. They've got to have so much turnover all the time to make the dollars at the end of the year. They can't afford to do stop.

I feel that we should have some regulations on corporate farming, because it's going to force the little guy out. Maybe, after a year or two, the little guy can't make it either, but with corporate farming, he doesn't have a chance--he's been kicked off. I feel that it has to be regulated.

I don't think the family farm is ever going to disappear, because only family farmers would do that dirty work for as cheap as they do it. The family farmer can do farm work a lot better and a lot cheaper--let's put it that way. They're willing to do more manual work and put more pride into it, I think, than what a corporation would do. So I don't think that family farming will ever end. I'm not going to say that there will be as many family farmers, maybe. But I don't think it will ever end.
MR: Somebody told me that you couldn't pay anyone to work as hard as this.

JS: He's right. There wouldn't be enough workers out there. Most hired people probably would pack up and leave. But family farmers take pride in what they're doing. I tell you--it takes both people in the marriage. It doesn't take only one.

You read about all the problems--of people going to work in town. Marcy loves secretarial work. She's good at keeping books, and she really does a fantastic job, but she can't get a job in town because I've got so much work here. I've told her to do it. I'd be willing to try it.

MS: The only thing is that more things would be left undone here.

JS: Yes, I can't keep up with it. But I've got to keep trying to get these payments paid off. You've got to put an effort into it. I had an idea about what I was going to do ten years ago, when we first started. I thought we might have a little more time off. But I got married not only to the wife, but to the livestock and to that herd.

But I take pride in what I'm doing. I try to do the best I can do. I know there's always room for improvement, and that's the thing about it. There's always room for improvement. Maybe it takes maybe a little longer to do some things. I've been working on that barn for years, and I'll probably be working on that thing until I quit. But I'll do a little at a time, and I'll look at it for a while and say, "That really looks good. I should have got it done sooner." Then something else turns up and I'll do something else for a while and get back to it later.

It takes everybody. It's a lot of sacrifice. There are a lot of things I'd love to do, but I know I can't do them. I've got to do this, and I like what I'm doing. I really like it. I know there are a lot of people who will have to make some sacrifices because of what I'm doing. That's the only part that's hard to justify. I try to give my wife a little more time off, and that's hard to do. That's why when she took that trip with the kids, we left one at home. We picked out the worst troublemaker to stay home.

MS: He was the oldest one.

JS: Yes, he was the oldest and could help more on the farm. He could carry more. I also try to do a little more when her mother comes out, so that Marcy has more time to spend with her. Her mother also calls every couple of weeks. And I don't ever say anything when she calls her mother because I know better.

MS: It's her expense.
JS: Yes. When Marcy calls--which is not that often--and maybe spends a couple of hours on the phone, I don't care because we can't take the time to go there and visit. At least you can talk to your family anyway.

MS: I've got seven brothers and sisters, so by the time Mom gets through talking about everybody, it takes a couple of hours.

JS: Well, I care about them. I like to hear what's going on, too. One of her brothers is a farmer out there. He just moved onto the home place and started dairying. We told him, "Boy, you better be sure and make up your mind."

I think he's realizing that now. He was a coal miner and worked odd jobs running a crane. His wife wasn't really up on farming. She's getting educated. She was doing pretty good for a couple of months the way it sounded. Now it's getting to her. And I thought, "It isn't going to take her much longer and those cows are going to be gone unless he quits all together and just milks." But I don't think he can do that because farming is a lot different out there then it is here.

MS: He doesn't have that much land.

JS: They don't have the number of acres. Farming is still a game. You've got to have so many numbers there. And that's the thing. You've got a ninety-acre farm out there, and a ninety acre-farm out there is average.

MS: And so many acres are pasture.

JS: Yes, there's a lot of pasture, and then they grow cage and potatoes. So that cuts into some of land.

But farming takes a lot of sacrificing. That's maybe the only bad thing about it. It takes a lot of understanding, not just with the family, but the creditors, too.

MS: You go through a lot of arguments.

JS: A lot of arguments.

MS: You're stuck outside all day long so you've got to argue.

JS: Yes, I keep telling her it keeps my heart going. I try not to argue too much. I never did argue much.

MS: Then there are times when you're loading hogs and they're going one way and another, and your husband's yelling at you.

JS: But she doesn't argue.
MS: I just want to get out of there.

JS: I try to change things. Maybe a farmer's more innovative when he's diversified because he has to come up with different ideas and do it cheap. That old board may be used for a sow floor one day and the next day it's used to nail up a pen. So you don't throw everything away, not even a shirt. You don't throw away a good shirt, unless the wife throws it away. Sooner or later, of course, you're have to end up by throwing it away.

MS: He wears his shirts until they're worn through.

JS: They're comfortable.

MS: I get at them and throw them out and burn them before he finds out about them. We've got a friend uptown who was laid off two years ago.

JS: Three years ago, yes.

MS: Well, anyway, he was bored silly, so he would come out here and help us. He ended up helping all one summer and fall.

He didn't want any pay. His wife wanted him out of the house, so he'd come here. It was great because there was always something for him to do.

JS: We kind of watched the hours he worked, and we gave him a couple of hogs in return. We've got a steer out there that we're raising for him. Now he's got a job again. He doesn't come out to help us much, but we're raising this steer for him. But the help--even if it's just for a couple of hours--is most appreciated. Then my wife doesn't have to come out and help. She'll castrate. She does pretty near all of the castrating. She takes care of almost all the work for the pigs. I take care of the dairy end of it--basically because I like the dairy end of it. But if she starts talking about getting rid of the pigs--well, then I'll start liking pigs, too.

MS: I'll do field work.

JS: But I feel that we've got to diversify if we want to stay in the farming. I feel more people should be diversifying. They wouldn't be hanging around uptown then. They wouldn't have time. You put your best effort into it--you do the best you can do and show that you're willing to work with everybody and that you're trying. Most creditors don't really bother you much, unless you get somebody who's a little hard-nosed and doesn't understand what you're doing. But it takes an awful lot of work. You pretty nearly give up your life for the farm, whether you want to or not.

MR: If one of your kids wanted to be a farmer, would you encourage him or her to do so?
JS: Not right away. I'd want them in school and I want them to work off the farm. Then they can come back, but not right away. I would never let them start farming right away, not if I could help it. They've got to see what it's like.

MS: It's better that they go out and try something else first to make sure they want to farm, instead of taking over and then deciding, "Hey, this isn't for me."

JS: They need to learn what's like to be on a pay scale and to live within a budget.

MS: Yes.

JS: Then, when you feel you're worth more than what you're paid, go up to the boss and ask for a raise and wait for two weeks before he gives you an answer. I've done that a lot. That's when you learn to appreciate what you've got.

A lot of these farms--boy, there's some big farmers around here whose kids just stepped into that brand new tractor, that brand new four-wheel drive. I've been able to step into one of those, but it's only been at one of the equipment shows. That's as far as it's going to get. But you know, I don't care. I know this is what I want to do and I've worked for what I want to do. But it's everybody working. It's Marcy working. It's the kids working. It's all of us working. It's not one of those situations where all I've got to do is step into what my dad did--that's when you don't realize how much money and time is involved.

MS: Your dad didn't help with any of this.

JS: Dad never helped. His reasoning was a little different than ours. We never argued with him. We thought, "He owns 160 acres. He farms on his own. There's one boy helping him. He works in town."

MS: Well, I think a lot of it was that with nine kids, if you helped one, you've got an obligation to the rest. So I think he stayed out of it because of that issue, too, which is good. You had to do it on your own.

JS: You appreciate it more because you work for it.

MS: And we never expected him or my mother to help, anyway.

JS: When you walk out in that cow lot early in the morning and you're sinking down to your knees in mud, you don't have to say, "Well, I could get out of it. Dad could take over."

You're going to walk through that mud because you took that farm on and you are responsible for that debt. You know that if you don't do it, nobody else will. So that part of farming is good. That's what I like about it. I think I like it. On cold days, I don't know if I do or not.
You've got to try. But you don't try to buy too much because your creditors are looking and will say, "Hey, how can he do that?"

Maybe we are sacrificing more than we should, but I want the creditors to know that our accounts come first and then we'll worry about what we've got. And we've done that.

MS: When you do get something, you do appreciate it.

JS: Dang right you appreciate it. Or when you've got some time off, you appreciate it. I had a buddy from Austin, from the time when I was a mechanic.

MS: You haven't been to their place since '75.

JS: All right, since '75. He came up to Mankato, what--two weeks ago? We met in Mankato. It was a ninety-mile drive for us. We met, and it was the most enjoyable afternoon I have had in a long time.

MS: We knew we wouldn't have enough time to make it all the way to his house, so he suggested that we meet halfway. Well, that was great.

JS: It was a little uncomfortable at first, because we were in a strange place, but we just visited together. I bet we spent two hours in a parking lot just talking. I enjoyed that because I was away from the farm. Marcy gets after me because I get tied to this place too much.

MS: He just needs to go somewhere, even if it's just to a little park for a picnic--anything, just to get out of here.

JS: Yes. That part--getting away from the farm--is nice. Then the kids get smart with you, and you need to get away from them once in awhile, too. Of course, the cars nowadays are tighter and smaller. The station wagon was nice because you could throw the kids in the back and they'd be eating dust all the time and wouldn't talk back to you. Now the cars are smaller and you've got the kids closer to you. I don't know if that's good or bad.

MS: Our oldest daughter is fifteen, so we told her that the station wagon will be her car.

JS: Yes, when the kids get caught doing something that they aren't supposed to be doing, we tell them that the station wagon will be theirs, and that usually straightens them right out.

MR: Thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Schewe.