TS: My name is Terry Shoptaugh. Today is June 12, 1990. I'm with Stewart Bass and Mr. R.G. Canning. We're talking about sugarbeets.

Mr. Canning, let's start with a little bit of background information. Could you tell me where and when you were born and so forth?

RC: I was born on this farm in 1912.

TS: And you say your grandfather settled this farm?

RC: Yes.

TS: When was that? Do you know?

RC: His first crop was 1876.

TS: So he was the original holder of the land. What was your grandfather's name?

RC: Charles.

TS: Your father was farming the farm in 1912 when you were born?

RC: Yes.

TS: What kind of crops did he grow? Do you know?

RC: Largely feed crops for livestock.

TS: Small grains and things of that nature?

RC: Yes.
TS: Did you work on the farm as you were growing up?
RC: Yes.
TS: Did you go to school around here?
RC: Yes, at Hendrum.
TS: At the public school there?
RC: Yes.
TS: When did you leave school?
RC: 1930, when I graduated from high school.
TS: [In] 1930 you graduated from Hendrum High School. Was your father still farming at that time?
RC: Yes.
TS: And you began working on the farm with him after you graduated high school?
RC: That's right.
TS: Were they still growing pretty much small grains at that time?
RC: Yes.
TS: You mentioned that at one point you had some livestock. You tried dairy herding?
RC: We had beef cattle and sheep and hogs.
TS: When was that?
RC: Oh, in the early '40s, mostly.
TS: When did you first get involved with sugarbeets?
RC: In 1948, which I believe was the first year of the Moorhead factory. I started renting land to various growers.
TS: And they were growers right around the Hendrum area here?
RC: Hendrum and Halstad area, yes.
TS: And when did you yourself first get a contract for sugarbeets?
TS: And do you remember how you got that contract? Did you go and talk to someone or did someone come out and talk to you?

RC: Oh, I guess the fieldman, Don Dobervich at that time, came and suggested that I look into it.

TS: I know a June Dobervich down in Moorhead, Fargo, and I wonder if they're the same family?

RC: Yes, it is.

SB: Dan still lives in Fargo.

TS: I imagine it is the same family. He was a fieldman up here at that time. He came out and talked to you and offered you a contract?

RC: Yes.

TS: How many acres was that first contract?

RC: Seventy-five.

TS: Do you remember any of the details of that contract? I'm not asking for specific prices, but do you remember some of the specifications on it?

RC: No. They recommended the usual good tillage practices. They recommended summer fallow at that time and phosphate fertilizer.

TS: They recommended phosphate fertilizer?

RC: Yes.

TS: Were you required at that time to keep one acre fallow for every acre of sugarbeets you grew?

RC: That was our practice. I don't recall if that was in the contract or not.

TS: And did you keep a separate field fallow and plant it in clover or something?

RC: We generally used a green-manure plow-down.

TS: What's the largest acreage contract you ever held for sugarbeets?

RC: When my son, Charles, was in with me, I believe 400 was our top.

TS: Four-hundred acres. Approximately when was that?
RC: The last crop was 1983.

TS: So you had 75 acres in 1961 and 400 acres in 1983. Do you remember the first crop you had? Do you remember what kind of yields you had?

RC: As I recall, it was pretty poor. We hit a real dry summer and, of course, inexperience.

TS: Was it somewhere--do you know an approximate number of tons per acre?

RC: I don't recall.

TS: But it wasn't that great. Do you remember what the largest yield you ever had was?

RC: No, I don't, except I remember particularly, I think it was 1982, the year that the beets froze. That was one of our largest yields and least income! [Laughter]

TS: So you had a good crop that year, but there was no way that you could deliver the beets because they were frozen!

SB: No, the beets were delivered, but we couldn't process them.

TS: Yes, because they were frozen.

RC: You haven't forgotten that yet, have you?

SB: No, none of us will forget that, Mr. Canning!

TS: So you figure that was a good year for growing, but a bad year for market. Did you get most of your advice in growing from the fieldman?

RC: It was very helpful, and, of course, there were always meetings sometimes sponsored by the county agent that helped, also.

TS: Who was your county agent during much of that time?

RC: I think Ozzie Dalbach. One of the most competent county agents I ever met.

TS: He would give you advice on growing sugarbeets then, too?

RC: Or give us access to advice.

TS: So he'd bring people with him sometimes who knew things. Were some of those people from the United States Agricultural Service?

RC: Yes, although our help generally came from the Crookston and
Fargo. Very little from the University of Minnesota at the Twin Cities.

TS: But you got some from like the University of Minnesota, Crookston, and their agricultural station there?

RC: Correct.

TS: Did you know Bernie Youngquist?

RC: Yes, very well.

TS: We interviewed Bernie about a year ago now, and talked to him in some detail. Did Bernie ever do any research down in this area do you know? Did he ever use any of the farmers down here to do any tests?

RC: I don't know of any.

TS: Did you go to some of the institutes that Bernie would have up in Crookston, the Sugar Growers Institutes?

RC: Yes. I attended them right along.

TS: What did you think of those?

RC: I thought they were well done and seemed to be improved over the years.

TS: Did you like the speakers more or the equipment displays more?

RC: Oh, I think it was kind of a combination. Outstanding speakers would get our attention on it.

TS: And what did you think of the equipment displays?

RC: Oh, I think that it must have paid off for the equipment companies.

TS: Did you find that you favored some equipment companies over others simply because of who the salesman was?

RC: I think that's kind of an individual prejudice.

TS: What kind of equipment did you use when you first got started?

RC: We had a number of International Harvester tractors.

TS: What did you use for a planter?

RC: I think it was a John Deere.
TS: John Deere? Was it four-row, six-row?
RC: I think the first year I used a six-row.
TS: A six-row planter. Did you pretty much stay with John Deere for planters all the way through?
RC: Yes.
TS: What about for harvesters?
RC: We tried different harvesters.
TS: Any one stand out in your mind?
RC: Well, the first one that worked fairly well was the Hesston.
TS: Sure. [Hesston] harvester. Any of them not work out at all? You decided they were pretty poor?
RC: I never owned an International one-way, but some of my renters did. I thought that was kind of a sad excuse for a harvester.
TS: When you began growing, did you use much hand labor at all?
RC: Yes, we used some right along.
TS: When you had like 75 acres, approximately how many hand laborers would you use at that time?
RC: We generally picked up itinerant crews so I can't just say.
TS: So rather than arranging for one crew to live on site, you pretty much just hired crews that were looking for work?
RC: Yes.
TS: Did you ever house anyone on site here at your farm?
RC: Oh, just occasionally.
TS: And what kind of housing did they have? It was just a converted building?
RC: We had a vacant house we used.
TS: Your first crop that you grew, back in 1961, where did you deliver the beets?
RC: To a railroad dump south of Hendrum.
TS: Railroad siding south of town?
RC: Yes.

TS: Did they have some kind of mechanical piler that you could use or loader?

RC: No, they loaded right into the hopper cars.

TS: They loaded them and they just had some kind of a conveyor-loader that would do that?

RC: Yes.

TS: How did they get the dirt off the beets at that time?

RC: Oh, I think it wasn't done too well. They hadn't apparently developed the good grab rolls then. They experimented with some and it seemed like they didn't work too well.

TS: So they were trying to use grab rolls at that time?

RC: Sometime during those years. I don't recall if it was at the start or not.

TS: In later years, where did you deliver your beets? Did you deliver them to a piling station?

RC: Yes, up here at Midway.

TS: And do you know where the beets went, those first crops that you delivered south of Hendrum? Do you know which factory they went to?

RC: I think they practically all went to Moorhead.

TS: And the beets that you later delivered to the Midway station, did they also go to Moorhead?

RC: I think so, mostly.

TS: Were you a member of the county growers district as well as the piling district or county growers organization?

RC: No, not the local.

TS: Not the Norman County Growers? You were just a member of the Red River Valley growers organization?

RC: A former director--I've got one of those plaques up there.

TS: So you were on the Red River Valley Sugarbeet Growers board of directors.
RC: One time, yes.

TS: Those early deliveries, when you would deliver the beets to the railroad dumping station south of Hendrum, do you remember problems with transportation, having to wait?

RC: It was quite a problem. The freights [freight trains] were sometimes two or three hours late. We wouldn't have any cars to unload our trucks.

SB: It was tough then, it was tough work.

TS: And, of course, you're paying labor to drive those trucks and sit around and wait during that time, so you felt like you were losing money. Did you ever complain to either your local field man or an agent for the railroad?

RC: Constantly.

TS: Do you know if some of the growers around here suggested ways to improve that?

RC: Oh, I think there were a lot of suggestions. It seemed obvious to many of us that American Crystal was deteriorating in their management.

TS: This was in the mid to late '60s?

RC: Yes. Even earlier.

TS: And what do you mean by "deteriorating in their management"?

RC: Well, it just seemed inefficient, the way they did things in remote control from Denver or someplace.

TS: So you felt like the people on site, the managers in the Red River Valley, really couldn't make decisions?

RC: That seemed to be the problem, yes.

TS: Did any of the growers suggest that even as far up here as Hendrum that it would be more efficient to just deliver the beets by truck down to Moorhead?

RC: Well, we had occasion that they would have us bring some trucks down there, but at that time we didn't have the heavy trucks that growers now have. So it wasn't very well done.

TS: What kind of truck would you use around, say, 1965?

RC: Oh, a tandem truck with a tag axle. There were very few twin-screws at that time.
TS: With a "tag axle"?
RC: Yes.

TS: And what was the capacity of a truck like that? I mean, how many tons of beets could it haul?
RC: Oh, I guess—I don't recall exactly—maybe nine tons.

TS: Now they can haul almost double that. You're getting up to 15, 16 tons sometimes you can haul. We talked about your crops and you figure that your worst crop was the 1961 crop simply because it was small and you were just new to the . . .
RC: Yes, I think we did better afterwards as we gained experience particularly.

TS: Do you think that 1982 was also? I mean, it was a good crop, but it was a disastrous season simply because the beets froze.
RC: Yes.

TS: Have you got an approximate idea what would be the best crop you had? Not just for tons of beets and good yield, but also for the profit that year, that worked out very well?
RC: No, I don't, because my son, Charles, was taking care of it at that time.

TS: Do you have an approximate idea of how much profit you could make per acre for example?
RC: No, I didn't keep that.

TS: Your son took care of all the finances?
RC: Yes.

TS: Did you ever have to leave beets in the ground?
RC: Yes.

TS: And was that in . . .
RC: I think that was in 1971.

TS: Is that because it was wet or because it was frozen?
RC: Wet, very wet.

TS: You simply could not get out into the fields to get them out?
RC: Yes. However, I believe that modern-day harvesters might have saved them.

SB: How many acres, Mr. Canning? Do you remember?

RC: About 60 or something.

SB: Yes, something like that.

TS: Did you ever have beets frozen into the ground?

RC: Just that one year.

TS: Then you had to leave them in the ground because they were wet and they eventually did freeze. Did you ever have a beet crop that you really considered was a failure?

RC: No.

TS: There were no real failures?

RC: No real failures.

TS: Did you ever have a year where you felt that you did not make any money?

RC: Yes.

TS: Which year was that?

RC: There were a number of them.

TS: So you felt there were years where you just kind of broke even or maybe lost a little?

RC: When grain was a good price, why, it made the beets look less efficient.

TS: Well, when you're comparing grain with beets, which takes more work?

RC: Beets, of course.

TS: During the time that you were growing, say, 400 acres of beets, how many acres of grain were you growing at that same time?

RC: A couple of thousand.

TS: You did not get into livestock again except for that time during the early '40s? On the whole, are beets a more stable crop in terms of the crop, though? I mean, grain does vary.
RC: Yes.

TS: You say that you were on the board of the Red River Valley Sugarbeet Growers Association. Do you remember when that was?

RC: It must have in the '60s. I got involved in establishing a county growers association here in Norman County and I have a whole file that I was about to throw away until I heard from you.

SB: Great.

TS: That's marvelous.

RC: Letters regarding it and from all the politicians of that era, Department of Agriculture, Washington, vice presidents and Orville Freeman when he was Secretary [of Agriculture], and so on and so on. All this might be of interest and you're welcome to take it with you and throw it away when you get done.

TS: That's wonderful.

RC: Here's an example [referring to document now in Canning files, RRVSGA Papers, S4868]. We had roughly 225 members on our first sign-up. We had a meeting at Halstad and we had people from all over, local.

TS: And it was called the Mid-Valley Beet Development Association.

RC: So I think I was on the Sugarbeet Growers [Board of Directors] previous to that. I don't recall. In that era, anyway, in the '60s sometime.

TS: The basic purpose of this—you say it's a Beet Development Association—was it to encourage more acreage for beets?

RC: Yes, and if possible to get another company in here to compete with American Crystal.

TS: Did you have a company in mind?

RC: We had Holly in mind and they even had an option on some of my land.

TS: I've heard that there was a time when Holly Sugar sent some people up here to look at the sights and see if it was feasible to build a corporation.

RC: I have the release from Holly here when we closed up that proposition and I'll give it to you.

TS: Great.
SB: Well, they ended up by owning two sections down by Harwood when they got done, and actually grew some beets.

TS: But they never actually built a processing plant?

RC: No. But, of course, they did haul in beets by rail.

SB: Yes, from out to Williston area.

RC: An endless amount of things like that you can look over. This is the letterhead of our organization.

TS: This is stuff that we definitely want to save. I can recognize a couple of the names on that [letterhead].

RC: Here's some of that sort of stuff. There are various clippings here.

TS: That's terrific. Were you on the board for the Red River Valley Sugarbeet Growers just a year or two years?

RC: I just don't recall.

TS: Do you remember much about when you were on the board, the kind of things that were discussed?

RC: It must have been before the buy-out of American Crystal by the Growers became serious because I wasn't involved in any of that.

TS: But at the time that you were on the board, perhaps they weren't thinking of buying American Crystal, but at that time they were dissatisfied with American Crystal?

RC: Yes. And I think the idea came more or less from the grass roots over a period of years. I might add to that many of us felt grateful to Al Bloomquist, the way that he went ahead with what seemed like a hopeless idea at the time. He pushed for it and sold us as individuals out here to put our money on the line.

TS: This is when they decided to purchase American Crystal.

RC: He deserves credit from those of us that experienced those days.

TS: Well, at that time, of course, they had to persuade each of the local organizations to support it, and then the final membership had to go to the annual meeting, back in '73, and vote on it.

RC: Right.
TS: Do you remember that time?

RC: Oh, yes.

TS: Do you remember growers who were just adamantly opposed to buying the Company?

RC: It seemed like they sort of changed. You know, for a lot of people, it takes a year or two for an idea to blossom.

TS: Yes. I'm not going to ask you to name anyone's name if you don't want to, but do you know a grower who gave up his contract rather than be part of the purchase and later regretted it?

RC: No, I can't say that I do.

TS: Did most of the growers around here go along with the idea?

RC: Yes, I think so.

TS: Now, when you were part of the purchase of American Crystal, each grower had to put up $100 for each acre of beets they were growing?

RC: That's what I recall.

TS: At that time, approximately how many acres of beets were you growing?

RC: I don't remember that either. It must have been something over 100, maybe 150.

TS: Well, let's just say it was 150. That would mean that you would have to put up $100 an acre for each of those acres and that's $15,000. Now, did you have to go to a bank to borrow that money?

RC: Yes.

TS: Did you borrow from the bank somewhere around here?

RC: Local bank, yes.

TS: Local bank here in Hendrum. What's the name of that bank?

RC: It's now a Viking Bank. At that time it was Norman County State Bank.

TS: Did you have to go in and talk to the head of the bank?

RC: Yes, the cashier, Mr. Adolf Lee, who was a very competent farm banker. He'd been there his entire working life. He'd watched us
all grow up, and he made loans on our record rather than the way so
many things are done nowadays.

TS: So he wasn't concerned about what you were putting up as
collateral, he was loaning it based on knowing you and knowing what
you could do?

RC: Ability. Right.

TS: So I take it that Mr. Lee wasn't skeptical about the idea of
purchasing American Crystal?

RC: Oh, yes. In fact, I took him to several meetings to help
inform him, very early in the thing. He had a lot of very good
questions.

TS: He did check it out carefully?

RC: Yes.

TS: Did most of the growers around here borrow from his bank in
order to put up their money for the purchase?

RC: I don't really know. I do think it was largely county banks.

TS: And once the purchase was made it was going to take a while
before they could modernize the factories and things like that.
Were the crops immediately after that, were they successful,
profitable crops or was there kind of a dip while they had to
retool the factories?

RC: I don't think there really was. I think we were quite
satisfied the whole way through.

TS: Were you able to expand your acreage soon after the purchase
of American Crystal?

RC: Yes. I just don't recall--probably when my son came back from
college.

TS: And so then you were able to grow more acres of beets at that
time. Did the profitability per acre go up after the purchase of
American Crystal or was it just that you knew you could grow more
beets and sell more beets in effect?

RC: Oh, I don't know. I think as you got more acres, your cost
per ton of production went down so that offset it. It's hard to
say.

TS: Do you think there's an optimum size acreage contract
depending on the machinery you have? Does it get too expensive at
one point?
RC: I think it all depends on the operator. I have a renter now that handles 800 acres of beets with no difficulty whatever.

TS: Well, just out of curiosity, you say that when you began the growing, you were using some International Harvester tractors and you got a six-row John Deere planter. Did you buy the planter at that time for using for beets?

RC: Yes. I just don't recall, but it seems to me we also used it for sunflowers and soybeans.

TS: And then you said you got a harvester, which really can only be used for sugarbeets. Do you remember what that harvester cost when you had to buy it?

RC: No, I don't.

TS: Say in comparison to a harvester now?

RC: I suppose it would be a small fraction.

TS: Have the equipment costs gotten so high now that it's difficult to grow beets?

RC: I think so. I think it's almost impossible for a new grower to start up from scratch now.

TS: It just costs too much cash up front? Let's talk a bit about the laborers that you would employ from time to time. Were most of the laborers you got, you said you got migrants?

RC: Yes. We used the high school children for some years, too.

TS: Oh, you did.

RC: Quite generally satisfactory and we thought it kept some money in the community.

TS: Pretty much what jobs did you hire these high school students to do? Thinning?

RC: For the general hoeing we generally hired the John Deere mechanical thinner. We leased one.

TS: And so the students would pretty much just weed, is that it?

RC: Yes.

TS: Did you have to use much in the way of pesticides and herbicides?

RC: We've put more and more into that in the last years.
TS: Was there a particular pest, like a web worm or something, that gave you a problem through a number of years?

RC: One time we had quite a little trouble with cut worm. Well, I don't know why there's any particular—it seemed like it just changed and we didn't have as much trouble. We have some coolie land and river-bank land and I think they were harbored in on the borders.

TS: What part of the plant will a cut worm attack?

RC: I just don't recall. It just seemed like all of a sudden you would find something radically wrong and clipped them off some plant.

SB: Just below the surface.

TS: And they literally would just destroy the plant before it came up?

SB: No, after it was up.

TS: They would just literally cut it off? I see, get right into the ground.

SB: Just like a cut worm does.

TS: Just leave you with a top that's dying. How did you get rid of those?

RC: Well, we tried various pesticides, but as I said all of a sudden it seemed to change. I don't know what happened.

TS: They just disappeared.

RC: We didn't have as much trouble in later years.

TS: When you used pesticides and herbicides, did you use pretty much ground-spraying machinery?

RC: Yes.

TS: Did you ever use any crop dusting or use any air spray?

RC: Whenever the weather conditions were that we couldn't use ground sprayers.

TS: So you just hired someone around here to crop dust. Did you ever make much use of the publications from American Crystal, like Crystal-ized Facts and things like that?

RC: Yes. We always felt anything like that was helpful.
TS: Did you use any other publications?

RC: Just anything that was available, farm magazines and what-not.

TS: I understand that when you signed a contract with American Crystal you would get what was called the "growers bible," some sort of a manual. Is that true?

RC: Some type. I don't recall that it was especially helpful. It seemed to me that it was always about a year behind.

TS: What about Bernie Youngquist's group out of Crookston, did they issue much in the way of publications and advice?

RC: Yes, and their field days were very valuable. We made it a point to be there.

TS: Would he send out grower newsletters or would he just send little flyers out?

RC: I think a combination.

TS: And you say that you talked a lot with Bernie?

RC: Yes.

TS: Would you go up to Crookston and visit with him and he'd get information?

RC: Yes.

TS: Did you know his research associate, Olaf Soine?

RC: Yes.

TS: What did you think of him?

RC: Another marvelous gentleman.

TS: Apparently he was the one that demonstrated that you did not need two acres of ground to grow one acre of beet.

RC: Right.

TS: And that once that was demonstrated, if you had a 100-acre contract you only needed 100 acres of ground.

RC: He did some excellent work on population of beets, too.

TS: Now, what do you mean by "population of beets"?

SB: The stand.
RC: Thicker.

TS: So that you'd get a thicker stand?

RC: Yes.

TS: And you mentioned Carl Ash briefly. That was a gentleman that you also got advice from?

RC: Yes. I met him at other occasions and somehow the talk would get back to beets.

[End Tape 1, Side A. Begin Tape 1, Side B]

TS: Okay, Mr. Canning, when you were growing as much as 400 acres, do you remember how many laborers you would employ at that time? Pretty much just for weeding purposes?

RC: No. We'd try to get a large group so that we could do it at the proper time.

TS: And were they mostly migrants by then?

RC: Yes.

TS: Did you have to have one person in the group who would speak English or did you speak Spanish?

RC: There generally was one.

TS: Did you find it necessary to talk to merchants in town who arranged advance credit for some of the laborers?

RC: Quite often.

TS: For instance, the grocery and the other stores in town?

RC: And we'd make sure the bills were paid before we'd settle up with them.

TS: Did you ever have any problems with that?

RC: Oh, minor. We found out that on average the migrants were honest with us.

TS: Did you ever employ families of migrants that would come back year after year?

RC: We did on occasion.

TS: Do you remember the names of any of those families?
RC: No, I don't know.

TS: We were mentioning a minute ago about growers' materials and the kind of help you would get. Would you say it was American Crystal's own publications that would provide you with the best advice for growing or just a variety of things?

RC: I just can't answer that, I don't think, because I recall these various things we got from colleges and county agents and so on. They kind of all blend together.

TS: What about other growers, just advice from other growers at meetings and informal gatherings and just meeting them in town?

RC: Yes, and we found some of the more experienced growers were very helpful. For example, Glenn Wiese's father was one of the better growers in the early days.

TS: What was his first name? Do you know it?

RC: Chris.

TS: And you would get advice from him and information from him on growing?

RC: Yes. And a close friend, Maurice Aronson, was very helpful, especially with my son.

TS: I think we've interviewed Maurice Aronson, haven't we?

SB: Yes. Maurice is a good, good farmer.

TS: I seem to recall, yes.

SB: A good man.

TS: And you say that your son, when you and your son were working together, he got a lot of advice from Maurice Aronson?

RC: Yes.

TS: Did you find that you, yourself, as each new crop came and went, did you find that you, yourself, were getting a real feel for growing beets and each time it was a lot easier or was each crop a new challenge?

RC: Oh, I think [with] any crop your accumulated experience is very helpful.

TS: Well, let's talk for a minute about the details of growing a crop. Approximately when would you put the seed in?
RC: I think that many of us—by the nature of our business—are gamblers, so we'd try to plant as early as we could and risk a frost in order to get that maximum yield.

TS: And so approximately when would that be? Very early in . . .

RC: Any time the ground was fit to carry the machinery.

TS: So you've actually planted sometimes in April?

RC: Sometimes too early.

TS: But you have planted in April before?

RC: We have, and had to replant sometimes and sometimes not.

TS: And approximately, say, when you were growing 200 acres—we'll just take that as a standard—approximately how long would it take you to plant the crop?

RC: Well, it always seemed like there were some fields that delayed you for either weed control or moisture or whatever so I just can't say.

TS: Approximately how many acres of beets could you plant a day with, say, one planter?

RC: Oh, I suppose, doing a careful job, 80 acres was about the maximum we ever did.

SB: When Charles was with you, you were up to 12-row planters then.

RC: Yes.

SB: And then you could get about 80 acres a day.

TS: So it was a 12-row planter and a good day, and if everything worked out right—no equipment problems—you could get maybe 80 acres of beets planted. Okay. Now, the next thing I assume was when the plants come up. You have to worry about weeds. You had to do a little mechanical thinning first.

RC: Yes, cultivating.

TS: Did you ever buy a cultivator or did you always rent one?

RC: No, cultivators we owned.

TS: So you could just use your own cultivator to thin them out. When you started growing beets in 1961, had they gone to the so-called mono-germ seed, which just yielded one plant, or did several
plants come up for each seed?

RC: I think we were just trying the mono-germ at that time.

SB: Just starting in the early '60s.

TS: So when you started planting they were just starting to use this so-called mono-germ seed that would yield one plant?

SB: Only about 20 percent of the crop.

RC: Yes, probably.

TS: And that made your thinning considerably easier?

RC: Yes.

TS: Well, using a cultivator on a good day, how many acres of beets could you thin?

RC: Oh, that varied so much. Cultivators changed over the years and grading systems and so on—I couldn't even make a guess, though.

TS: What would be a bad day, other than none? I mean, with an equipment problem.

RC: A bad day was a rain on the other end of the field. [Laughter]

TS: And the next problem after thinning would be--the next thing you'd have to do for the crop?

RC: Oh, just the usual. When we started with the herbicides, why, there was always a period of spraying.

TS: If it was too dry, did you have a method for irrigating? Could you irrigate at all up here in your fields?

RC: I tried. I experimented with irrigation for a few years previous to the beets and I tried it one year on the beets. It so happened that I put two and a half inches [of water] on this field out here and we got a cloudburst the next night. So I sold my spray and my adder!

TS: Irrigator.

RC: Yes. So that was that. [Laughter]

TS: What's better? I mean, did you ever have a season that you thought was ideal weather? Just enough rain at the right time?
RC: Rarely.

TS: Was it more common to have a season that was too dry or too wet?

RC: Well, of course, you see, that varied, you know. You always had different fields. You don't have them all in one field. Every field has its own characteristics. Sometimes it will be one or the other. That's something you can't make a flat statement on.

TS: If you had to ask for one--I mean, they're not going to offer you perfect weather, so it's either going to be dry or wet--would you rather have a dry year or a wet year?

RC: Well, we found that after you get your beets properly started, they withstand dry weather very well.

TS: Now, by "properly started," how high would the stand have to be?

RC: Oh, just get a few leaves I think, and start putting their roots down.

TS: And then after that they'll handle dry weather?

RC: They'll handle a lot of it.

TS: And then if you get enough rain right towards the end to add size to the beet?

RC: Later in the season is really necessary.

TS: Beets are pretty hardy plants then, aren't they?

RC: They're more hardy than you'd think, driving or hauling them or looking at them from the road.

TS: Are they hardier plants than wheat?

RC: Oh, no.

TS: Are they hardier under the ground than potatoes?

RC: I haven't had much experience with potatoes.

TS: Have you ever had beets damaged by hail?

RC: Yes, we have, but it takes a very severe hail storm to really cut the yield.

TS: And they can't be damaged by wind, really, being so low to the ground? On occasion?
RC: Yes.

SB: When they're young they can be.

RC: A severe hail, of course, will clear the ground. As far as the leaves being shredded and so on, that doesn't seem to bother them.

TS: Did you ever have to replant because of hail?

RC: I don't think so.

TS: Of course, you haven't grown in the last few years--but was there a year when there was a drought that particularly harmed a crop?

RC: Oh, occasionally, but I don't recall any specific date.

TS: Well, after weeding the crop, after using herbicides and hand weeding if necessary and hoeing if necessary, can the crop--other than worrying about the sufficient rain--can the crop pretty well take care of itself over the rest of the summer?

RC: Pretty much.

TS: Well, when harvest begins and you have to get the beets up and get them delivered, approximately how long did it take you to harvest 100 acres of beets?

RC: Well, of course, that was kind of regulated, you know, by delivery.

TS: They would give you a delivery schedule?

RC: Yes.

TS: In the early years, were the schedules set so that you had to deliver sometimes only at night and sometimes only during the day, during 12-hour shifts?

RC: Most of the time.

TS: Did that vary each season?

RC: Yes, we changed every other year.

TS: So that one year you delivered during the day shift and one year you delivered during the night shift?

RC: Well, they split it from 2:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. I believe, or something like that.
TS: So you got a little bit of darkness, a little bit of light for each shift.

SB: Were you using four-row harvesters when you finished the last year with Chuck?

RC: In the last years we were.

TS: And in the early years you were using what kind of harvesters? This Hesston two-row?

RC: Three-row, I guess, to start with.

TS: Approximately how many trucks would you use for harvesting a crop of beets of, say, 200 acres?

RC: Well, that was regulated by the planning committee. I think the most we were allowed was three trucks.

TS: Once you went to deliveries to piling stations in trucks were you still finding that you were waiting in line a lot to use the pilers?

RC: Yes, quite a lot.

TS: At that time, did they just have a single-piler rather than a double-piler?

RC: A single-piler most of our years.

TS: And usually there's only one piler during a lot of those years so you had to wait in line quite a bit. I remember talking to another grower who said that's when you got to visit with all of your neighbors, while waiting in line to deliver beets. After you delivered the beets, when would you receive your first payment?

RC: Generally in November, as it is now.

TS: And when you delivered you would receive a tag that told you the weight of the beets?

RC: Yes.

TS: Did they always take samples of your crop for sugar content?

RC: No, not until later years.

TS: At that time, when you first started growing, they were basing it on the average for the whole area?

RC: Right.
TS: So it was in later years that they started taking out sugar content analysis for every crop?

RC: That certainly was the proper way.

TS: When would you receive your final payment? Was it paid out over three or four installments?

RC: Three I believe, wasn't it?

SB: Yes, in general. There were two payments; one was made at the end of October, then if there were still beets delivered after October 31, they had a November 15 and a December 15 payment, initial payment, and then the next payment usually came in the spring and one in the fall.

RC: That's the way it was.

TS: And by then you're ready to start on the next crop. Did you ever think of giving up your contract before you retired?

RC: Not really.

TS: Was it a pretty good cash crop to have on hand?

RC: Yes.

TS: Other than the time you served on the board with the Red River Valley Sugarbeet Growers, did you ever hold an office in any other capacity with the Beet Growers?

RC: No.

TS: Do you remember some of the leaders in this area of the Sugarbeet Growers, some of the county leaders and things like that? Do you remember dealing with some of them?

RC: Well, I guess a person knew them all, but I can't remember the specific names now.

TS: Like in the local area here, how did all the growers keep in touch with each other? Mainly just by personal contact?

RC: I think so.

TS: Was there a county growers newsletter or any kind of thing like that?

RC: I don't recall a newsletter, but they had the county growers meetings, you know, sometimes twice a year.

TS: And you went to those meetings?
RC: Surely.

TS: Were they just entirely business meetings or were they also social meetings?

RC: Mostly business.

TS: At that time, when they would have county growers organizations and then, of course, they would elect representatives to serve on the board of directors and so forth, what did you think of that whole system of representation? Did you as an individual grower, did you feel that your views got heard all the way up the line?

RC: Oh, I thought it worked out very well.

TS: And when they changed over to piling districts after the purchase of American Crystal, did that work better or worse or about the same?

RC: No, I'd say the same is very true.

TS: After the purchase of the Company in 1973, did you find that it was necessary for you as a grower to work harder in keeping in touch with elected representatives at the state or federal level?

RC: I don't think there's any difference.

TS: Have you in the past contacted [people] like Arlan Stangeland or others to express your support for the sugar legislation?

RC: Yes.

TS: Do you mainly just do that by letter?

RC: Sometimes I had a phone call, following up a letter.

TS: Have you ever gone to testify before any government committee?

RC: Not about sugar, but I have on other items.

TS: Concerning other growing matters?

RC: No. Principally flood control.

TS: You mentioned that you were involved in drainage here. What was it exactly?

RC: I served on the state of Minnesota Water Resource board for a number of years. We promoted a dam at Twin Valley as a combination thing. Roughly, we suggested that at the time that we were working with Holly Company because the question of water in the Red River
was pretty serious in some of those dry years. We proposed a dam at Twin Valley and got the Corps of Engineers to survey it and so on. A number of us went to Washington and attended hearings on the matter and so on. And then, of course, after Holly pulled out, why, it was immaterial to the beet business, but many of us kept on that, but so far we don't have that dam.

TS: Do you remember what committee it was that you testified before? Was it an ag committee or subcommittee?

RC: I think it was the--I don't recall the name--but it was the proper subcommittee that had to do with flood control projects.

TS: Do you remember who the chair of the committee was, what senator or what representative?

RC: Unfortunately it was a Tennessee senator.

TS: Tennessee River Valley area, okay. Was there a senator from North Dakota or Minnesota or somewhere in the upper midwest?

RC: Well, whoever was our representative or senator at the time was always very cooperative. For example, Milton Young in his day.

TS: What about the senators in Minnesota, Humphrey, McCarthy?

RC: Yes, Humphrey was quite helpful. One of the real helpful ones was Congressman Oden Langen. He was from up in this area.


RC: We felt that he was no help to us whatsoever.

TS: What about the current crop?

RC: I just don't know. It looks to me like they're all doing all they can to protect the sugar industry against some pretty stiff opposition.

TS: Do you feel that the success of the sugar industry here in the Valley can be primarily credited to the growers or to the companies or to the legislation? I mean, where would you give the lion's share of the credit?

RC: Well, I suppose that without legislation there's no use discussing the rest. So we wouldn't put that in opposition to any of the others, but I do think that what sustained it all the years is the population of the area. You go up and down the Valley and you think of people like the Rosses or those up in Warren and down at Comstock. You've interviewed Trowbridge and people like that.

RC: With their interest and speaking up at every opportunity to support the beet business, why, I think that sort of pressure is the grass roots pressure that helps anything.

SB: Absolutely.

TS: Do you think that the industry would be very successful here in the Valley if the growers hadn't purchased American Crystal?

RC: No.

TS: You mentioned attempts to bring Holly Sugar Corporation or another sugar company in to build a plant in this area. Do you think that the industry in the Valley would be stronger if there was a second company?

RC: I don't know, but I do think that the potential threat to Holly or somebody else coming in had something to do with the old American Crystal board of directors being willing to sell out to us.

So I think the efforts that we put in there and the legal costs and everything like I personally went through with the potential contract with Holly, all had an affect.

TS: Did you ever regret growing sugarbeets?

RC: No.

TS: Do you ever miss growing sugarbeets?

RC: Not at harvest time. [Laughter]

TS: That's understandable.

SB: It's better than it used to be, though.

RC: It's a young man's business.

SB: Yes, it is.

TS: It takes a lot of work on the part of the grower, and a lot of attention on the part of the grower. Do you think the better farmers in the area are the ones that make successful beet growers?

RC: It seems to be inevitable, that you have to do a good job the whole rotation. Not just with the beets, the handling of your land clear through; preventing erosion, controlling weeds, keeping your fertility level proper.

SB: Beets make a good farmer a better farmer.

TS: Do you feel that you have to keep learning in order to grow
sugarbeets?

RC: Oh, definitely. With any crop.

TS: Any crop. It's not possible to just learn a basic way of growing and just keep doing that year in and year out and be successful?

RC: No. Absolutely not.

TS: That you have to just keep learning each year and keep up with new technology and new ideas. Can you think of anything else you'd like to add?

RC: Not really.

TS: Well, I think we've got a very good interview and I'd like to thank you for doing it.

RC: I thank you. It's a pleasure to meet you people and thank you for doing this. I think it's valuable for the history of the industry. There's so much history that's gone, and it's good your doing some of it for us.

TS: Well, thank you.

[End of Interview]