Interview with Ole and Mary Finstad

Interviewed by Terry Shoptaugh and Stewart Bass
Northwest Minnesota Historical Center

Interviewed on June 4, 1987
at the Finstad’s home,
Georgetown, Minnesota

Terry Shoptaugh - TS
Stewart Bass - SB
Ole Finstad - OF
Mary Finstad - MF

TS: This is an interview with Ole and Mary Finstad, June 4, 1987. Stewart Bass and myself, Terry Shoptaugh, are present and we're going to talk about sugarbeets. Okay Ole, a minute ago you were telling me that you came to the United States around 1899. Is that right?

OF: No, it was, let's see....

MF: Three years old when you came here.

OF: Three and a half or something like that.

TS: And that was from Norway?

OF: Yes.

TS: And that your family originally lived up in Winger?

OF: Yes.

TS: Did your father and uncle farm up there, too?

OF: No, he didn't farm up there. He worked or something.

MF: He worked there. When he first came.

SB: In farming?

OF: Well I suppose it was farms.

MF: He helped on the farms.

OF: Then he came down here with somebody when threshing. I think he came to Perley. There was somebody there that he knew. I don't know how he got down here, I can't remember. He met this guy that owned this farm. I think he helped thresh there. He
was looking, he lived down in Illinois someplace and he owned this farm down by the old Hudson trading post. That's what they [his father's family] lived in then was the old....

MF: It was a log house that they lived in.

ST: On the Buffalo [River]?

MF: No, right down here.

SB: By the bank of the Red [River].

OF: On the north side right by the Red.

MF: By the bridge over there.

OF: Right by the bridge.

TS: You lived there until they bought the farm around 1903?

OF: Yes. We lived there a year and a half, I think. We worked there one winter and a year. Then my uncle and him bought this quarter [section] here.

TS: So they bought this quarter section around 1903 and began farming.

OF: Yes.

TS: Do you know what they first grew, what kind of crops? Did they grow wheat?

OF: It was wheat, barley, and oats, flax.

SB: Did they rent additional land or farm just the quarter?

OF: Yes, they rented some more acres.

TS: Then when you became old enough, you must have started helping out on the farm fairly early.

OF: We got an old sulky plow from Emerson, and I was nine years old about ... I plowed about 85 acres.

TS: When did you take over running the farm? Do you remember that, roughly how old you were?

OF: I helped, all the time I helped.

SB: Did you say you actually were doing plowing when you were nine years old?
OF: Oh yes. On that sulky plow. That was our neighbors.

TS: When did you meet Mary?

MF: We went to school together, over here in the Finley School.

TS: So Mary, you grew up in this area?

MF: Yes.

OF: Yes, she was born down by the river here.

TS: You said your father settled here from Germany?

MF: He came, worked around for people first and then he bought a farm of his own and then started farming.

TS: So the two of you went to school together?

MF: Yes, we went to school together.

SB: Where was the school house?

MF: Do you know where Finney's are?

SB: Yes.

MF: Askegaards?

SB: Yes. Right in there?

MF: There was a school just a little ways from there.

OF: I went to [school in] Georgetown, too. We went to school one year up there, a year and a half.

TS: When did you get married?

MF: Oh, I think it was, was it 1942 or 1940/42? We've been married almost 50 years now.

TS: Ole, when did you begin growing sugarbeets here on the farm?

OF: 1922.

TS: 1922. Were you in charge of the farm then?

OF: Yes.

TS: You had inherited the farm from your father by then?

OF: He was here but I did the farming.
SB: How many acres [of sugarbeets] did you start with, Ole?

OF: I think it was 40 acres.

SB: 40 acres.

TS: Why did you decide to start growing sugarbeets?

OF: Well, there was one guy who had a few acres in 21, but that was a different company. Then in 22, Chippewa Falls Sugar Company, they came up here and they needed more beets cause they said down in Wisconsin there was so much clearing that they didn't get enough acreage. Then they shipped beets by railroad cars. Then the railroad company, being that they were getting started, they gave them a special rate. I think it was around 80 cents a ton just to get it going.

TS: Just to get people to start growing.

ST: Ole, when you took those beets to the station, how did you load them into box cars?

OF: Open cars.

SB: Open cars, right. Did you shovel them, hand shovel them in?

OF: No. The farmers went together and they built an elevator.

SB: Yes, but you shoveled them off the wagon or dumped them into....

OF: No, we tipped them in.

SB: Tipped them into this elevator?

OF: They built the ground up and tipped them in like they tip grain.

TS: Now you say the farmers went together and bought this elevator. That they......

OF: They built it.

TS: They put the effort together to build it down by the rail tracks?

OF: Right in Georgetown.

TS: In Georgetown.

OF: Everybody helped to do it.
SB: Ole, do you remember about how many of them were involved in 1922 when the Wisconsin company was pushing for beets?

OF: It was quite a few.

TS: Was there more then a dozen?

OF: I think there was a little more, about 14, 15.

TS: About 14 or 15 farmers?

OF: Yes.

TS: How successful was it to grow beets the first couple of years? I mean, it was different from the other things you had grown.

OF: Well. I don't know. We got $6.00 a ton.

SB: How many tons to the acreage, do you remember that, Ole?

OF: Well, that varies.

SB: I know.

OF: We had German-Russians tending them the first two years.

TS: They were the ones that knew more about beets?

OF: Well, they came up here from Nebraska.

MF: Oh, from Nebraska.

OF: Omaha, I think it was. They [the sugar company] shipped a whole train of them.

SB: In 1922 then, did you still grow for the Wisconsin group?

OF: That's it, for the Falls for 2 years.

SB: Okay, then in 1923?

OF: Then they went down to Chaska.

SB: Chaska, okay. Was that the year then you started as a group with the original American Beet, or the St. Louis Sugarbeet Company?

OF: I don't know. We ran with them [to Chaska] one year.

SB: Yes.
OF: Then they built the one up at....

SB: In 26 the Grand Forks factory was built. That was American Beet from then on.

OF: Yes. Then, when they built the Moorhead plant, I think they built on the Crookston too first.

SB: Well, 1948 in Moorhead and 1954 in Crookston, was when they were built.

TS: These were all eventually to become American Crystal Sugar, was that correct?

SB: American Beet was the predecessor to American Crystal Sugar Company. In 1936 we just switched names.

TS: Actually it was around 1923 or 24 that the predecessor's of American Crystal began to contract with the farmers in this area to grow sugar beets. That would be about right? Is it more or less difficult to grow sugar beets then other types of crops, like wheat?

MF: Not really.

OF: Well, it's more work, of course. In the old days, there was a lot more work, of course. You know you shovelled them.

MF: You shovelled them into a wagon with a shovel.

SB: Every beet was handled by somebody's hand.

OF: You had to top them by hand.

MF: Throw them on a pile and then they shovelled them in a wagon.

SB: Ole, when you first hauled the beets, you hauled them with horses?

OF: Yes.

SB: Teamed, double teamed?

OF: Generally, two horses.

SB: Two horses and a cart, I mean a four wheeled wagon?

OF: And they were dumped sideways.

SB: Yes.
OF: After the first year.

SB: Right.

OF: John Deere made a loader.

SB: Loader, right. You always hauled to the Felton piling station?

MF: Georgetown.

SB: I mean the Georgetown [station].

OF: Till they built this one here [near the farm].

SB: Yes.

OF: We didn't haul right away. One year, I think we hailed [directly to the Moorhead factory] for two years because the pavement going south of us was so rough. We shipped once, so it was much smoother going at that time. We got 50 cents [per ton] less but it was worth it.

SB: The original Georgetown permanent station on the railroad was almost the end of your lane out here. Wasn't very far from it.

OF: No, the last place they come to was on the west side of the railroad.

SB: Right.

OF: Down there.

SB: Down a little ways close to the...

MF: It was a little ways from the elevator.

SB: Yes.

OF: A little bit north.

TS: So during the 20s, you began to grow more sugarbeets?

OF: Yes.

TS: Towards the end of the decade, by around 1930, how many acres of sugarbeets were you growing, would you guess?

OF: Oh, about 80 acres I guess, something like that.
TS: Something around 80 acres. What did that represent, about half the farm?

OF: No, a section.

TS: Just a section. Okay. During the Depression, were sugarbeets more or less profitable then other crops?

OF: Well, sugarbeets was really the best.

TS: During the 1930s, sugarbeets got you the best price and the best profit?

SB: Would you say they were probably the surest crop, I mean from the standpoint of knowing you were going to get some money for them, because of the contract?

OF: There was some bad years. Sugarbeets if you got them started, they were pretty good and then they were a pretty fair, sure crop.

TS: What were the main things you had to worry about in growing sugarbeets -- weather, insects, or what was the biggest problem in caring for sugarbeets?

OF: Well, the weather was the biggest problem. Too much rain or not enough.

TS: It takes just the right amount of rain?

OF: Well you know, if you had it [the ground] pretty well ditched, they can stand quite a bit of water. Sometimes it was hard to get them wet quick enough. If it got real hot, then it got fairly cool, then we could stand it for quite a long time.

SB: Ole, do you remember some of the tons per acre you got in those early years, some of the highs and lows? Six ton, nine tons?

OF: Five, six, eight, ten, nine, twelve, fourteen, sixteen, eighteen; if it was exceptionally good.

TS: Eighteen tons per acre is quite a lot.

SB: That was in more recent years?

OF: Yes.

TS: In the early years, five, six, seven tons would be considered a good yield?

OF: Seven, eight; ten tons was real good.
SB: Yes.

TS: Of course at that time you had to rely primarily on animals for your power and your machinery and your hauling. When did you get your first tractor?

OF: What?

TS: When did you get your first tractor, your first power tractor?

OF: Well, I don't remember for sure.

TS: Was it sometime in the 30s?

OF: Yes, it was in the 30s.

MF: We got the first John Deere that come from Fargo.

OF: No, that was the Model-T, though. I got the first one.

SB: Then you started hauling with the trucks?

OF: Yes, we started hauling with the trucks.

TS: You bought your first truck in Fargo?

OF: I don't remember now where I bought it. I think I bought it from Harris Brothers.

TS: Do you remember that, Mary?

MF: Harris Brothers.

TS: Harris Brothers in Fargo?

OF: They were in Moorhead.

TS: Can you remember when he brought the truck home?

SB: Do you remember the model year of that truck? It had to be before '31 because they switched....

OF: It was a Studebaker. It's still sitting out here [on the farm].

SB: Is that right?

MF: It's all played out.

OF: We also had a used, me and John Jepson had a used Ford, we
bought.

MF: Was it a used Chevrolet?

OF: No, the first one I used was a Studebaker.

SB: A Studebaker.

MF: Oh, yes.

TS: Sitting out here still?

OF: Yes.

TS: Mary, a minute ago you mentioned something about prisoners. Was that during the war?

OF: Yes.

SB: During the Second World War.

OF: Yes, during the Second World War.

TS: And you had some of the prisoners that were kept in the camps?

OF: In Moorhead.

TS: Yes, just north of Moorhead near Paul Horn's farm.

OF: Right in Moorhead.

TS: Yes, so some of them worked for you?

MF: Yes.

OF: Yes, and we would go in and get them.

MF: Ole had to go scared to death to get those prisoners. He had to go get them in the morning, early, and then late at night he would haul them home.

TS: Did any of them speak English? Mostly Germans, weren't they?

MF: Yes, they were.

OF: There was one that spoke English a little bit.

TS: What did you do, convey what you wanted done to the one person and he told the others?
OF: Yes. Then you know, we wasn't suppose to give them anything, you see. But, it was kind of cold, and I bought them gloves, caps, and things you know.

TS: For the winter?

OF: Yes, for the fall.

MF: It was cold when they were chopping the tops [of the beets] off.

OF: Then we would bring them lunch.

MF: I wasn't supposed to give them lunch, but I tell you, it was so cold, you put water on the ground it would freeze and I felt sorry for those poor guys. Why, I didn't get no sugar, I made cake out of syrup.

TS: Here you were growing sugarbeets and you couldn't get sugar?

MF: Well, we saved the sugar what we got you know, we just got so much you know. And then Ole would come take coffee and cake and I would fix sandwiches up for them [the P.O.W.'s] and they ate that.

OF: Paid in food.

TS: Now if I recall, you were only allowed to pay them about 75 cents a day because that is what the Geneva Convention allowed as a maximum you could pay for labor.

OF: I think we were not paying them anything.

TS: Oh you weren't?

OF: But they got, they collected their money ...


TS: The Association paid their fees. I see.

OF: But we gave them a little money, and like I said, we gave them lunch you know.

SB: Did you also use them in the thinning in the spring, too?

OF: No.

SB: Just in the harvest?

MF: In the harvest.
SB: Going back then prior to World War II, let's talk a little bit about the labor that was used in the spring and the fall, but particularly in the spring.

OF: First we had those German-Russians.

SB: From Nebraska.

OF: From Nebraska. They worked here for two years.

MF: They came up here for two years.

OF: Yes. They shipped them up here by train.

TS: Where did they live?

OF: Well, we had, there was a house on the corner over here.

TS: You had a little house?

OF: Where the trees were.

SB: Most all the growers had their own housing for them [i.e., laborers].

TS: This was effectively migrant housing?

SB: That is exactly right. Did you ever have the Mexican Nationals on your farm, that came out of old Mexico under the visa agreement?

MF: We had Mexicans that used to work here.

SB: From Texas.

MF: Before they got the machinery they've got now.

SB: Yes, but do you remember whether those were what they called the Mexican Nationals that were imported from old Mexico?

MF: I don't know what they were.

OF: Most of them were raised in this country. We had one family here for several years and his wife couldn't speak English but he could. He was a pretty good worker.

MF: He came back every year and we'd give him a job to tend beets.

OF: Then you know, when they got short of money we would have to send them something.
TS: Did they come up on the railroad? Did they travel up on the train?

OF: At first they did, but then they drove cars.

SB: They travelled on their own. We [i.e. American Crystal Sugar Company] furnished, we recruited them. The company recruited them, sent them to different farms. The Nationals all came up either by plane or train.

TS: So that during the 30s, you did use migrant workers from Texas, Mexico and a variety of other areas.

OF: They really come from Texas and from some other states.

SB: We recruited in Arizona, too.

OF: Yes.

TS: Now how many pounds of sugarbeets could a person harvest in a day?

OF: Well, I don't know for sure now. Some quite a few.

TS: Were they paid by the pound or....?

OF: So much an acre.

TS: So they were paid for harvesting a certain amount of ground. In cotton farming, the migrant worker was paid to harvest so many pounds, commonly paid a penny a pound.

OF: The first years they I think, they got $24 an acre for thinning and harvesting, the first two years. Then we [i.e. the growers] got $6 a ton for sugarbeets.

SB: Ole, do you remember in 1926 when the company really started, did you deal pretty much with one field man? Do you remember some of the early field men you had?

OF: There was one field man for several years.

MF: He was from Sabin. What was his name? Kirkhorn?

OF: Kirkhorn, right.

SB: Leroy Kirkhorn.

OF: I think he is living yet, isn't he?

SB: No, he just died, very recently. Howard Tweeton was the early manager.
OF: There was another one here for a long time. I can't remember now. He was a man who raised some beets himself over here. I can't think of his name.

TS: These were the people who would negotiate the contracts with you?

OF: Yes.

TS: Now did the company keep you supplied with information on beet growing? Would they give you information on new fertilizers, new growing methods, new methods of irrigation?

OF: Oh, yes. They gave us some in meetings here [i.e. held on this farm], too you know.

SB: Dan Dobervich is who you were thinking of.

OF: Yes.

MF: That's who it was.

OF: Then there was somebody, he bought, he raised some beets himself, that's the first one. He was....

SB: Emmett Gunderson?

OF: No. It wasn't him either. The farm is over here and the fellow that he had farm it for him, he owns it now. I can't think of his name.

MF: How far is it from here?

OF: Well, it's three miles east of Georgetown and about four miles south, down by the river. Five miles south maybe. I just can't think of his name. I don't know, I can't think so good today.

TS: Now you said that the company representatives would have meetings with the farmers. Would they do that every season?

OF: Yes they did. They used to....

SB: ...go over farming methods, how to farm?

OF: And what percent broke down.

SB: Yes.

SB: Ole, did you ever leave any beets in the ground, at harvest?
OF: Not very many. I know one year I think I lost about five, six acres.

SB: It was too wet?

OF: It was wet and then it got so cold, we couldn't free them then. But you know, the freezing didn't seem to hurt many. The ground...

SB: How about from what you contracted in the spring to harvest. Were your loses very heavy in those times, that is if you contracted 40 acres and you harvested 30?

OF: One year we lost an awful lot. We just got the knolls. It rained and rained and rained, there was no end to it.

TS: Was that your worst year with sugarbeets?

OF: Yes, that was about the worst year.

TS: Do you remember approximately when that was? Was it in the 30s or the 40s?

OF: Yes it was in the 30s.

SB: Harold Helmeke -- you know Harold -- had the distinction of losing the most beets of any grower in the Valley. That wasn't very far from here.

TS: What do you remember as your best year in growing sugarbeets? Was there one that stood out?

MF: Last year.

TS: Last year?

OF: Last year it was good.

MF: Last year was probably the best year.

SB: It was good sugar, too. [i.e. It had high sugar content.] You guys are doing a good job of controlling nitrogen. That brings up another question. When did you start applying fertilizers and what type? Do you remember using phosphate?

OF: Well, I don't remember what kind it was. It was some awful stuff to handle. It came in burlap sacks and you know you would get your knees full because they wouldn't hold them tight.

SB: Came in on rail cars?

OF: Yes.
SB: Can you think back and tell us a little bit about how you got involved in the growers association? Do you remember the first time that meetings started from the growers side, not the company but the growers side?

OF: Well, I know we had meetings in the hall in Georgetown. We all signed up for it.

SB: It was called the Red River Valley Growers Association.

OF: Yes, I think so.

TS: Do you remember the first people who organized it, the first officers in the group?

OF: I can't remember for sure now. They had a meeting in the hall, and then they voted somebody into the head of it. I think there was a fellow south of Moorhead that was the first president.

SB: Hugh Trowbridge?

OF: Yes, I think so.

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

SB: Ole, can you remember some of the more humorous experiences that you may have, with the company or the Association?

OF: Well we had the prisoners. There was one of them wrote to me, from Germany.

MF: When he got back?

OF: It was when he got home. He was a young guy. The letter come from...

MF: That was the one who could talk English.

OF: [The envelope was addressed] "Ole Finstad, north of Moorhead, near Kragnes." Somebody said I worked down there by Georgetown.

MF: It was on the envelope, you know, north of Moorhead. The address was Ole Finstad, north of Moorhead.

TS: What was he writing about?

MF: It was war then you know. They couldn't write much then. He just wrote that he got home and that he appreciated what we did for him. He even sent us a picture of his wife and their
baby when he got home. We still have that.

TS: During the war, the Germans were the people we were fighting, and of course, we were presenting them as the enemy in films and newspapers. It was quite amazing to really meet them in person though, wasn't it?

MF: Oh yes, I should say.

TS: You just kind of found out that they were just ordinary people?

MF: They seemed to be real nice kids, you know. They were all very sensible.

SB: They were probably a lot happier being here at the beet field then where they would have been in a large camp.

SB: During harvest, going back to some of the weather conditions, did you ever take beets out with snow on the ground?

OF: Yes. We got soft snow once, and we did good on this side of the trees here. Then some out south here.

MF: I could see the last load go and half way out the yard you couldn't see the truck. It was in a snow storm.

SB: Was your first full harvester an International, one row?

MF: Wasn't it a two row?

OF: Yes, it was a two row.

SB: Did it top them and lift them and put them in the truck?

OF: No, we just lifted them and then the Mexicans piled them and then we trenched them.

SB: Made an aisle for them?

TS: And then they would be loaded?

SB: Do you remember the first full harvester, that topped and lifted them and then put them into a truck? Was that a John Deere?

OF: Yes.

SB: Or an International?

OF: It was John Deere.
SB: John Deere, one row?
TS: When was that, in the 40s?
OF: Yes, I suppose so.
SB: Right after the Second World War?
OF: Yes.
OF: It had to have someone to sit down and steer it.
TS: That was a pretty expensive piece of equipment, wasn't it?
OF: It had bigger spades. After it got wheels then it was....
SB: Much easier. A lot less dirt. Did you have somebody up on the picking table for that?
OF: Yes, we had a belt up there.
MF: Picking off the mud. There was some big ones [mud clods], too, that come up.
OF: The only thing I've got left is an old two row cultivator that's still back there.
SB: Don't let that two row cultivator get away cause we're also working on another set-up with Bonanzaville [i.e. Cass County Historical Society]. We're going to try to collect some of this older equipment.
OF: Did you know that there is --- is it Krabbenhoft that has all that old machinery? South of Moorhead there some place.
SB: Right. That is Krabbenhoft.
OF: He has an awful lot of stuff.
SB: Well, another one was Harold Peet.
OF: Yes. He has a lot
TS: Those were expensive pieces of machinery to buy for the first time, weren't they? You had to be a bit of a mechanic to take care of them?
OF: Some of this stuff, like the drill, I've got one of them someplace, but I don't know where it is. It was a monitor drill.
OF: It was four row. It is down here someplace, or at Marquart's. Me, Marquart and Herman had it together. I don't no just where it is. I'm going to see if it is around here some place.

TS: Now tell me, you farmed sugarbeets for so many years that when you began you were using horses and laborers to take care of and harvest the sugarbeets and haul them away. Now you have reached the point where they are using very complicated pieces of machinery, very expensive pieces of machinery. Which was easier, taking care of the machinery that we have today, or trying to take care of the horses and the people earlier on? Which was easier?

OF: I'd have the machinery. You know that the machinery they've got now doesn't cause very much trouble. After we got those lifter wheels, that saved a lot of effort.

TS: What about the early machines in the 40s and 50s? Did they take a great deal of care or were they pretty easy to handle too?

OF: What?

TS: The early machines, in the 40s and 50s, were they hard to take care of?

OF: Well, they didn't stand up as good.

SB: They changed them every year. The troubles were basically because of that.

OF: John Deere came out with the first two rows, you see, with that picking table on top. If they had had the lifter wheels right away, it would have been alright.

TS: So each new model would come out and the farmers would use it and they could tell the people who made the machines what needed to be changed and what needed to be improved so they could make a new model?

SB: It was the grower ingenuity that really developed the machinery as much as the manufacturers themselves. Going back to the time of horses, did you breed your own horse stock or buy them? What kind did you use, Belgians?

OF: Well they were mixed horses. Some of the horses were awful good to walk straight. Some would swing their feet and they would swipe into the wrong things.

TS: Did you breed your own horses or did you just buy horses?

OF: We raised them for quite a few years.
SB: The horses you have now are strictly Arabians, for pleasure?

OF: Yes, they belong to his [i.e. Ole Finstad's son's] wife over here. That's poor profit.

TS: In growing sugar beets, were you bothered much by insects? Did you have much problem with insects?

OF: Not too bad. No we were pretty lucky.

TS: Did you ever use crop dusting?

OF: Yes. There was one year we had quite a few grasshoppers. But after the beets got a very good size, they didn't bother us.

SB: Just the edges?

TS: Of course, grasshoppers can't harm sugar beets the way they can do damage to wheat or other crops.

OF: Not that much. If you sprayed around the edges, that helped.

SB: Ole, did you ever hold an office, local office in the sugar beet growers association, on the board?

OF: I was on some part of it.

SB: Yes. What are you looking at now as far as the future, in your mind? Now this is a tough one to answer, but what do you see in the future?

OF: Well, it should be good yet for quite awhile. You know, they have this artificial stuff, but I think they will have to quit that. That is awful hard on people's health.

TS: You're talking about the artificial sweeteners?

OF: Yes. You know, sugar is natural. It don't hurt you as much as some of this awful tasting stuff.

MF: We've got so much of that sweetener you know, I think that is kind of hurting the sugar industry, too.

OF: Well, it's hurting some now, but they shouldn't allow them to do that because it hurts the people, too.

SB: Ole, in 1973 when the growers purchased the company, you were in favor of this right off?

OF: Oh, yes.
SB: And, helped on the organization in getting it done?

OF: Oh yes. I talked for it whenever I could.

SB: How now do you feel the co-op, or the company is, acting as a service to you? Are you getting good information? We haven't talked about the university [i.e. North Dakota State University] research in sugarbeets. Are they giving you good up-to-date information?

OF: Well, whatever we need. And you know, growing hasn't changed any really. You got to take care of the ground, that is the main thing.

SB: Tom Dunford is your field man?

OF: I don't remember now who is here now. We're going to have a meeting here pretty soon I think, dinner or something.

TS: As we said in the beginning, anyone who farms anything for 64 years is going to have bad years and good years.

OF: Oh, sure.

TS: It sounds like overall, you've had a pretty good experience with growing.

OF: Pretty good, we can't kick.

MF: This last rain we've had saved our necks.

TS: For this year?

MF: Yes, because a lot of the beets were just laying in the ground and after we got the rain, they started coming up.

OF: You know, it all depends on nature yet.

SB: Sure it does. Do you remember some of the beet seed you had back in the 30s and how many pounds you planted?

OF: We didn't need to plant so many because there were so many seeds in each plant.

SB: Right. I mean mono-germ [seed].

OF: That was a good feature.

SB: When the mono-germ [seed] came and began to get developed, that was one of the big steps forward, I would say.
OF: Oh, that is a big step. Then they got this new drill.

SB: Yes, the precision drill. The present day seed that you have available, several different varieties and different companies produce it.

OF: They have better varieties, too, I think, then what they used to have.

SB: I see Paul [i.e. Paul Finstad] is wearing a Beta hat so he must use Beta seed.

MF: I think he planted a couple kinds of beets, different seeds.

OF: And that new drill, that is an awfully good outfit.

SB: Do you do any long-handled hoe work now with some migrants?

OF: No we haven't.

MF: Well, once in awhile.

OF: If there happens to be some stray weeds. I see now they are starting to make a rig for them to ride on with three-four guys on there with hoes. That works pretty good. They don't have to walk. With a hoe, you can reach quite a ways.

SB: Ole, have you ever had any regrets about being a farmer?

OF: No.

MF: Lots of hard work but it's fun.

OF: Well, you know, hard work is good for a fellow.

TS: Well, your son must believe it too. He's chosen to follow along.

OF: It was tough on us when we were young. I would get in a hundred or so tanks, scoop them way over my head and never stop.

MF: Of grain.

OF: Yes, and they held three quarters of a bushel.

SB: Do you know how many acres of sugar beets you are growing presently?

OF: 190 acres.

SB: 190 acres?
OF: I think so.

SB: You're farming a full section now?

OF: Well, a little bit over. Paul rents a little. I own the sixty acres. I could have, should have had more. I could have bought more. I figured I had enough. But I know some growers who have got too much. They can't get more than 1500 hundred dollars an acre for land in this county....unless it was for building sites or something like that.

SB: Ole, when you acquired that first quarter of land, do you remember what you paid for it, per acre?

OF: I don't remember for sure. It was a short quarter. My uncle bought it and then I bought it from him. I don't remember what I paid for it.

MF: $15 an acre?

OF: No, he paid more then that at that time.

MF: Then it was $25?

OF: About $30 an acre.

OF: Then we bought that other quarter, the Anderson quarter, I think that was $34.

SB: That was in the early 20s?

OF: It was in the early 30s. Then we bought this quarter down here. I forget what we paid for that. About $30 some dollars. Then we had, I bought an 80 acre section over here. This other 80 went with this one over here. This 80 over here, I think I paid $35.

SB: You've had this land for a long time, this full section.

OF: Yes. I farmed it a long time anyway, and then I bought it after I farmed it for awhile, whenever...So I could get it. See, this quarter down here, some fellow from Illinois had it. I bought it from him. He died and then his wife sold it. That is kind of a short quarter because the old highway and the railroad and the new highway goes out of it.

SB: One more question. Back when you were putting beets into rail cars, prior to when we had piling stations, were there periods of time that you waited for cars pretty regularly?

OF: Oh, there was time for waiting.
SB: That slowed harvest down?

OF: Yes.

SB: The elimination of the railroad wasn't anything but helpful then at harvest time?

OF: No. It wasn't very often we had to wait for cars, but once in awhile we waited. And then, they had the old dumping doors stuck two times.

SB: Well I think, is there any other thing that you can think of that would be of interest?

OF: No, I can't think so good today.

TS: I think you've done well.

SB: I think you've done very, very well. We do appreciate your help.

TS: Thank you.

OF: I'm kind of lucky anyway you know. When we get to 90.

[End of interview]