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Chuck and Rita Dudgeon

Chuck Dudgeon

Rita Dudgeon

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KENYON COLLEGE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Stories of Knox County

Chuck and Rita Dudgeon
Interviewed by
Gabe Jimenez-Ekman and Maria Brescia-Weiler
On
March 25, 2017

Kenyon College

Oral History Project
Stories of Knox County

Interviewee: Chuck and Rita Dudgeon
Interviewer: Gabe Jimenez-Ekman and Maria Brescia-Weiler
March 25, 2017

Gabe Jimenez-Ekman: This is Gabe Jimenez-Ekman with the Stories of Knox County project interviewing Chuck and Rita Dudgeon on their experiences with life in Knox County. Today's date is March 25th and we're speaking at The Dudgeon Family Farm. Thank you for you for your willingness to participate. Could you please state your full names and birthdates?

Chuck Dudgeon: Charles Dudgeon, birthdate 6/19 of 1956.

Rita Dudgeon: And Rita Dudgeon, March 28th of 1958.

Maria Brescia-Weiler: How long have you lived here?

CD: I have lived in this house since September of 1958. Prior to that, I was born in the Fredericktown area. My parents come from Auglaize and Allen County, western part of the state. That's where my father was raised. Come back for a family reunion in Knox County, met my Mother Frances Hall. She was raised raised right at the edge Gambier, now Kenyon owns ninety percent of the original Hall tract and it's been preserved. Part of the, what is it, the Arboretum? Up on top of the hill?

GJE: Oh, the Observatory?

CD: Thank you, observatory-- is on the Hall property, so I've got a ton of history on both sides of the family here in Knox County. To the best of our knowledge, our ancestors come from Ireland in, I believe it was 1809, done some work in New York through Pennsylvania settled here in Knox County Harrison Township. That was in December 11th of 1811 that they settled into the township and built their first log home which is still standing. It was being lived in as of last fall. The current owner of that property built a new home and that log cabin is being sold, torn down and moved. It's somewhat of a disappointment to us but we did not have the financial ability to purchase the home to move it to reconstruct it to its original state and so it's been sold to someone else. So it's a part of history that's being lost in this community, sadly.

MBW: (gestures to Rita) Have you always lived in Knox County?

RD: I was born and raised in Mount Vernon, I lived there until I married him (Chuck) and then I moved here. So I've lived in two homes.

CD: But this, this is the only home I've ever known, when we moved from Fredericktown I was right at two years of age and I have no memories of that home whatsoever. So this is the only home that I've ever known. It's the only home I'll ever know. Unless she puts me in a nursing home! (laughter).

GJE: So what type of farming do you do?

CD: Currently we are just a beef cattle operation. We do not do grain crops at all anymore, we made that decision probably five years ago with the cost of land, the cost of machinery, the cost of the fertilizer, the chemicals, the seed, I could not maintain it as a business. To stay in that business you have to become quite large and I did not have the capital and did not wish to stick my neck out and risk losing our home just to invest so we can stay in the, in the grain part of the industry. So we switched all, to all beef cattle. We purchase very little commercial fertilizer anymore, we use what the cattle have as waste as fertilizer. Our chemical purchases are down to one jug a year instead of drums and drums a year, and I fully understand that in today's world without the technology of GMOs, fertilizers, chemicals, we would not be enjoying the abundance of food that we've got. It's just not possible. So, but we kind of got away from that-- one jug a year instead of drums and drums a year, we're just strictly beef cattle. I'd never seen corn plants have much of a personality, every one of my cows has got one. Some's not a good one. (laughter) But I, uh, I'm at ease a lot more with the livestock than I was with crops.

GJE: And is that typical of cattle farmers, to not have to use a lot of chemical inputs?

CD: For the most part yes, now currently we're kind of diving into the science of things a little bit with cattle and part of that is due to the changing of times. Typically you have some cows which are referred to as brood cows, you go purchase a bull, they mate at will, they have calves and then you market the calves in the fall. We are investing our time and energy into artificial insemination. I can buy semen from bulls that have a million dollar value and inject that into my herd. And I can't afford to purchase a bull like that so I can buy Semen from from those million-dollar bulls, inject into our genetic bloodlines. The next thing we have tried this past spring is what they call embryo transfer. They'll take semen from a high-quality bull, put it into a high-quality female. Seven days later, they remove the fertile eggs, they freeze them and then they can thaw those out and implant them into my cows. And then I can raise more modern-day animals that have a larger volume of lean red meat and less fat, less waste. So therefore that's kind of leaning towards what the market is dictating today. But to do that with my own genetic selections and purchasing bulls, it's a very very slow process and you never get to what the customer wants.

Clara Roman-Odio: Do you do the fertilizing yourself?

CD: No, I have a, they're called embryologists. They are certified with the state, they have a license to do it, they're very professional. I don't fully understand the science but they'll take that egg and they will insert it through the cervix and implant it in the specific place that it needs to be. And it's a science all in itself, it really is. But it's something that has intrigued me over the years and something I've thought about trying never did. Now the frozen sperm, per say, or the fertilized egg, either one, I just talked to fella this week, that he had done this twenty-five years ago, had frozen fertilized eggs and he sold them to another fella recently. This past year he implanted that twenty-five year old frozen egg into a cow and got a calf.

Clara Maria and GJE: Wow!

CD: That's amazing! That's truly amazing! And a lot of people look at agriculture as being, especially in the livestock industry, as not being forward thinkers, not taking advantage of new technologies, and we're trying to keep up with that a little bit, as best we can.

MBW: So can you talk about how you learned how to farm?

CD: Well, I was raised on a farm, it was just kind of... it was one of the things you got up and done everyday and dad was somewhat of a disciplinarian. (laughter) The animals required being taken care of before we were. As kids we always had chores to do, he would challenge us everyday: "Did you put the fresh straw in the barn for the cows?" "Yeah." "Did you make sure the water tank was full?" "Yeah." Did you feed him their grain and hay?" "Yeah." And if he found something we didn't do, and supper was on the table, we had to leave and go do it. The farm, the livestock, the welfare of the farm, come before us, and you don't see a lot of that anymore. People tend to care of themselves before they do their business. And that's why business fails. (Rita gestures that she has something to say) Yes Ma'am.

RD: And then tell them, it really, farming is in his blood. Tell them about the time you skipped kindergarten, what did you do?

CD: At that time my father was employed by my eldest brother and he was on the road in a cheap welfare service and the next brother down was sixteen, he was basically in charge of running the farm. And we need to take care of hay that day, it was in late May. So mom sent me down to the school bus and my brother intervened at the corner of the house and said "No, you come with me, I got somethin' for you to do." At five years old I'm raking hay with a tractor with no one else around. (laughter) I didn't get it in trouble but my brother... is not quite so fortunate at the end of the day... (laughter) and he's also the same brother that Dad had him cultivating corn up the road one day and he said "Okay I'll finish the field, you go home and eat dinner and take care of the animals," and so my brother drove the car home and the sheriff followed him down the road and asked my brother, he says "Do you have a driver's license?" "No." He says, "How old are you?" "I'll be thirteen next week." (laughter) My father got the ticket for that. But there's a lot a lot of that we do on the farm that seem very peculiar to non-agriculture people but it's one of those things, it's like "Yeah, we've always done it... and why not?" That attitude is changing over the years. Unfortunately with agriculture it's "This is the way I do things, it's none of your business." That's not true anymore. It's everybody's business. So we've got to change our ways.

GJE: Where do you sell most of your meat?

CD: I sell the calves as what we call feeder calves, they weigh anywhere from five to seven hundred pound, they go to a auction barn in Zanesville, which is the Muskingum Livestock Auction, if you ever get a chance to go down there and sit through their sale, it's educational. They run live animals through a sale ring, different people bid on 'em, a lot of my cattle go out of state. Right now Ohio does not have slaughterhouse big enough to accommodate feedlots, so most of these cattle will go to Iowa, Nebraska, Dakotas, in the West, because that's where the major slaughterhouses are... It's a transportation thing. They can haul several five-hundred pound calves West cheaper than they can haul one thousand two hundred pound calves back for

slaughterhouse. So they combine them on a trailer, ship them West, they feed them out, they've got abundance of grain, so they feed them out and they go to the slaughterhouses out West, and then they're packaged and sent back East.

GJE: So how long are they continued to be fed after someone buys them at the auction?

CD: When I sell them, they're roughly six to eight months old. Most of those kids who go straight to a feedlot. They'll be there for five, maybe six months. And then they're sent on to processing.

GJE: So why don't you think there are other major slaughterhouses around here to prevent all that transportation?

CD: Government regulations.

GJE: Really?

CD: Yes.

GJE: Are those made to protect surrounding areas?

CD: The government injects regulations on slaughterhouses that are... and I don't want to say they aren't safe, but they're overbearing. So people in Ohio cannot afford to put in a slaughterhouse to meet all the current regulations that's on the table. The slaughterhouses you see that are in Ohio are probably fifty to sixty years old and they're grandfathered in. If they wish to expand, now they gotta gut everything and start all over and they can't afford it, so they can't expand, they can't build a new facility, they're stuck with what they've got and as long as they can maintain it they're in good shape, but to add on, it's not a possibility. Our local butcher shop is a fine example of that, DJ's in Fredericktown is the local slaughterhouse for packaged meats, and I asked the owner one day, I said, why don't you build on? Because if I was to call up there today, it'd be four to six months before I can schedule an animal to get in. They're that booked up. And he says "I can't." He said "If I change one thing in here," he says "I gotta gut the whole building and go by current regulations" and he says "I can't afford it."

GJE: So are they at risk if something breaks and they have to do a big repair?

CD: They can repair and maintain, they can't add on. So the slaughterhouses then in Ohio are tied by government regulations, some good, some not so good. When you hear E coli, salmonella outbreaks in slaughterhouses... there has never been an outbreak in in a state-certified slaughterhouse... it's always been one in a federal slaughterhouse. Federal government is bigger than state and that's where the problems are. They're not in the smaller houses, they're in the large ones and when there's a contamination it's disastrous.

GJE: And those are the ones in Iowa, those are the federal slaughterhouses?

CD: Yeah.

GJE: Those are the ones this regulation ends up forcing people to use?

CD: Yup.

GJE: That's interesting.

CD: I mean, we need checks and balances all through, but they're making it so that the small guy is... it's almost impossible to get in the business. Right now, I do have a license to apply chemicals. I have to. I can't purchase them without having a license. I go to training every three years. I don't use them per say, but if I give that license up I'll never get it again. I've got a license to apply fertilize. Right now, I can't buy fertilize to put on my land unless I have that license. Now they're trying to incorporate animal waste into that category because it's a nutrient. I have to have a license to spread animal waste. (laughter). I've got a license to drive my pickup truck and then I had to get an additional license to be able to drive a grain truck because it weighs over twenty-six thousand pounds. So every time you add another fee, license, whatever, pretty soon guys are just gonna give up and say, "I can't do it."

GJE: And then that leads to more factory farm business, right?

CD: There you go. You hit the nail on the head with that one.

GJE: I guess to continue with that line of thought, in an interview from 2001 would change a lot in the next twenty years. We're almost twenty years past.

CD: You're right!

GJE: We wanted to ask if...

CD: And that's where the regulations comes in; twenty years ago I didn't have to have a license for fertilize, I didn't have to have it for chemicals, I didn't have to have it to drive a big truck, I didn't have to have it to haul animal waste. And it's only getting worse. The clean water act that was enacted... twenty years ago, that didn't affect us because the state and EPA and federal government only looked at rivers and streams that were navigable. Meaning if you could go down it in a canoe, it was under their jurisdiction. This little stream out here, was not. They've changed that ruling—now EPA claims they own that little stream. They claim that they own the side ditch that has water in it. If you've got a yard that has a puddle of water in it that big (gestures to show the size of a small puddle), that's theirs. And they control it. It's just went from bad to worse. In '95 or six, we were investigated by EPA. This farm was. Because they felt that I was polluting the streams. At that time, I got some legal advice and they kept it at the County level, which I was thankful for that, but when I responded to them, I said "you guys don't have a leg to stand on." At that point in time, EPA could only control what they call point pollution, meaning if it comes out of a pipe, they've got some say in it. If it doesn't come out of a pipe, they have no say. And what was coming out of my cows was not out of a pipe. (laughter) But I did recognize that this was an issue that's moving forward, it's only going to get worse. So I avoided that bullet, but in the meantime, they highly suggested that I fence off my streams and not let the cattle in. I know at the time, it was very upsetting to me, we drew up a plan: we're going to fence off the streams, we're going to drill additional water wells, we're going to put in more electric service, we're going to pump underground water to tanks out in the field, and for this hundred-thirty-acre farm that we're on right now, was gonna cost a hundred thousand dollars. And the local government said, "And we'll pay twenty-five percent of that." "I can't

afford it. I'm gonna have to go out of business. No, I'm not gonna do it. Right now, legally you can't make me. No, I'm not gonna do it." A week later, they come back and said "We'll pay fifty percent of it." I still can't afford that.

GJE: And it shouldn't be a negotiation game with the government...

CD: A week later they come back out, say "We'll pay seventy-five percent of it." I'm irritated now. "No." And what do you think happened a week later? They agreed to pay it all. With local taxpayer dollars. I said, "You're out of your mind!" I said, "If every farm has to do that in the county," I said, "You will bankrupt the county. You will bankrupt the state. Go away. I'm done talking to you." I got pulled into a board meeting with other local farmers and they were going to shut me down. I said, "Okay, do it. But before you do, here's pictures. Here's a picture of this guy's farm, this guy's. Look at these pictures. If I'm in violation, are they in violation?" "Uh, yes they are." "Why haven't you done anything?" "Nobody's complained." "I will in the morning. I will file a complaint on every farm in Knox County by eight o'clock tomorrow morning." And I says, "I don't think you know what's gonna happen," but I said "But I'm gonna tell you. Every federal dollar that comes to this county, and I don't care for what enterprise, every state dollar that comes to this county, I don't care for what enterprise, I have created enough question about this county that they will stop all state and federal dollars coming into this county." I said, "Just like that. It's done, it's over." "You can't do that." "Sure I can. But before I leave I want you to look at these pictures again. Study 'em." "We've seen 'em, we don't need to see em." "Oh, this one's of your farm. Here's one of yours, here's one of yours. I'm going home, seeya." And I left. So the administrator come out the next morning, and he says "We really gotta work something out." I said, "Yea, I know." I said, "This isn't gonna go away." He said "Nope," and he said "The board is scared." I said, "They should be." I said, "Here's what I'm gonna do." I said, "I'm gonna put up three strands of (inaudible) fence on each side of my streams, I'm going to dig the dirt out in specific areas and lay large stone in for the cattle to walk down in," 'cause they was concerned about the cattle pushing mud into the stream. I said, "I'll rock the stream bottoms and make a specific crossing form." I said "I will do all the labor, and you folks in your fine office will supply me with all the materials. Sign here." (laughter) And it was just that quick and easy. But that's how government regulations is choking not only agriculture but every small business in the country. It's just forcing them out of business. Now, to go back and say "Have I seen the benefits of it?" There's this thing called intensive grazing, and I know we're getting off target here a little bit but I've got water in that field and I've got water down there, I've got water out there, I've buried water lines. And some of them are spring-fed, some of 'em are pressurized from the house. But by being able to rotate my cows there in this field for three days, (points to fields around the property) they're in this one for three days, they're over in this one for three days, over in this one.... I have greatly increased the growth of grass by letting it rest, and therefore I've went from having twenty cows on this farm to fifty. So by what happened in '95-'96, I've doubled my production by implementing some of these things. But I had to do it over a slow period of time. I gotta do one little project, pay it off, then start on something else. A hundred thousand dollars all in one shot was not gonna work.

MBW: Do you have a job off the farm?

CD: Yes I do. I work at Siemens Energy in Mount Vernon, which used to be Rolls-Royce, which used to be Cooper Industries, which used to be Cooper Energy, which used to be Cooper-Bessemer. (laughter)

MBW: Have you always had a job off the farm?

CD: No... well... let me back up.... Yes. Shortly after we were married, I used to shear sheep for a living. And that become quite awkward for my lower back and hips. And I gave that up many many years ago. I've worked in the oil field drilling wells. I was very fortunate to get a job in Mount Vernon back in 1988, I've been there ever since, I've never been laid off a day in my life. It's been very very good to me. If they shut the doors tomorrow I can hold my head high and say "Thank you for what you've done for me." There's no guarantee in any job. But to go back to what you're asking there, I cannot think of any farm out there today that does not have supplemental income. Either the spouse works, they've got oil and gas wells, they're retired and on social security, they sell seed corn on the side, or they do farm repairs for their neighbors. I can not think of one farm in Knox County that does not take in money as an off-farm income.

MBW: Was that true when you were growing up?

CD: No. No.

MBW: You mentioned that your dad had a job off the farm?

CD: Yes. He worked at Kenyon College for two years, and then he went to work for my brother... it was in the area of taking care of sheep. They... at that time, ticks were a large concern in the sheep flocks, so they built a rig to submerge sheep into a vat of chemicals, so to speak, which killed the ticks and the sheep thrived after that. So he worked at that for many, many years. I'd say in the early 70's he was pretty much on the farm alone because most of the family was gone from home. His bills were greatly reduced, he didn't have large mortgage payments. And then in about '78 he decided he was going to... no, I take that back, that was in '74... at that time I was still in high school, and working at a manufacturing facility in town for... well we all gotta have gas money (laughter) and Dad wasn't gonna give it to me! So I worked in a manufacturing facility in Mount Vernon and I come home one night, it was ten o'clock and he was still awake and I thought, "That's kinda odd, something must be wrong," and I said "What's up?" and he said "Mom and I decided, we're going to retire. We're gonna sell the farm, unless you want to farm." I'm a senior in high school. I said, "Oh... how soon do you want an answer?" "I'd like to have it by Monday morning." This was Thursday. (laughter)

CRO: These are clear questions and clear answers.

CD: So... Come Monday it's time to fish or cut bait. So I made the decision to invest my life into agriculture. I put in my two weeks' notice at the factory and I've been here ever since.

CRO: How soon after did you meet Rita?

CD: Oh, go for that one! (gestures to Rita) Come on, tell the story there!

RD: You were the one who was partaking in that! He.. I think... you... did you pay my brother

to get a date with me? How did that work? I can't remember, I seriously can't remember!
(laughter) My brother wanted to date a girl he was dating, and he said, "Well if you get me a date with your sister I'll give you her number!" (laughter) So that's kind of how it happened. Then, he called me and I was nineteen maybe and I didn't know him from Adam. I'd never met him, never heard of him. And he said, "Hey, we're all going to a movie at seven o'clock, do you wanna go?" And me, not knowing him, and I said, "No thank you!" And some a year later, he called me again and gave me two weeks' notice. And I went out with him and that was it.

CD: And she's stuck to me like glue ever since.

CRO: How long did you date?

CD: Hm, a little over a year?

RD: We dated, we were engaged after what, three or four months, but then we didn't get married for another year.

CD: Yeah.

CRO: (laughter) A lovely story!

RD: Definitely funny! Ha ha ha! (laughter)

CD: Every relationship has got to have some humor in it. I mean, anybody that wakes up grumpy in the morning is just setting their stage for a bad day.

RD: And the humor never stops with him, just like this morning! I was on the porch in my muddy boots, and I said "Would you please hand me the broom so I can get this swept off?" He carried the broom out and he said, "Okay, make sure you're back by ten because we have that meeting!" (laughter)

CD: And the broom is broken now! (laughter)

MBW: So you both mentioned that you can't imagine living anywhere else—why is that?

CD: I've thought about living in town and it just gives me chills. I like my openness out here. I'm just not a town person. I just can't do that. There's... I don't even like the cars going up and down the road, but I can't stop that. We are very fortunate where we live... I mean, we'll go outside and look around, but you will never ever see another house from here. The ones you see, you'll see. There will never ever be another one built. We are in the Ag Easement Protection Program. We've sold our development rights to the state. (gestures to another farm) That farm sold theirs to the state. (gestures to another farm) That farm sold theirs to the state. The one up on the hill sold theirs to the state. My view will never change when it comes to more houses. It's just... kinda unique. To the South, the only people I have to deal with up there is the Church and the cemetery and the guys in the cemetery's not giving me a problem. (laughter) They've never complained about anything.

GJE: So being out here, how do you interact with your community and how do you think that differs from people who live in Mount Vernon or less rural locations?

CD: As far as being involved with the community, I'm the chairman of the Knox County Cattleman's Association, which, we put on different events through the year and we interact with public and try to enforce that we're trying to do the right things with animal husbandry and...

RD: And giving back the community.

CD: Yeah. It's a non-paid thing, so everything we do is volunteer. I am the vice-president of the cemetery up here, that's how I keep those people under control! I've served on many, many different boards. I was a Township Trustee, I was on the zoning commission for a while, I was on sheep improvement, active with the Knox County Farm Bureau and also with the State Farm Bureau. So we do interact with a lot of the community in many, many different ways and we have to-- Everybody needs to get along.

GJE: Does religion play a big role in how you integrate with the community?

CD: How do I wanna answer that? (laughter)

RD: Go for it!

CD: Okay—my wife is a devout Catholic, she'll go to church seven times a week if she can. I am not. But I do believe in Christ. We differ in that, and we allow each other to differ in that, and we don't challenge it. I don't feel the necessity to go to church when I can talk to God when I'm on the tractor or walking through the fields.

MBW: (addresses Rita) How about you? What's the role of religion for you?

RD: Oh boy, that's a tough one... I have evolved so much over the years. I was born into St. Vincent, my whole family was Catholic and I was born into that, so I was baptized there, first communion, confirmation, all of it. And living here, that's where I've gone all my life. I think I could count on one hand the times I've missed Sunday mass, not because I had to, because I love it. I need it. And that's kind of what fuels me, is I know that I need that affirmation every week. And more, if I can get it. Just that time. And it... I do a lot more of the things that don't get a lot of recognition, you know, I just try to help out where I can. I do hot meals, so, we cook, I think I do... three months a year, my team, we cook the big hot meals, we feed eighty to a hundred people, we buy the food, we cook it, we serve it to 'em. People who need it, there is a free meal in Mount Vernon seven nights a week, so no one should ever go hungry in Mount Vernon. And there are three or maybe four of the churches that help do that, so everybody has night or two, so we can do that. I think the only day that they don't have a meal is Christmas Day. They don't ask anybody to come out and do that, you know. But those people need it, you know? So, I just do things like that and I try to keep peace a lot and sometimes I fall off the wagon at that! (laughter) But it has pretty much shaped my life. Yeah.

MBW: Was it a big adjustment for you to move from Mount Vernon to out here?

RD: Huge.

CD: (laughter) There was a boogeyman everywhere!

RD: (laughter) There was, around every corner! Because we lived in Mount Vernon, right in the

heart of town, so we could walk everywhere we went. And there were neighbors ten feet out your door. We were never alone, you know, there was always someone... and then moving out here, it was an old farm house, everything creaked, we never locked the doors, ever. Our doors were never locked, for probably the first twenty years we were married. Not at night, not when we went away, our doors were always unlocked. We probably didn't even have a key.

CD: We left keys in the vehicles...

RD: Yes! All the time. And he would go out to work and when we first started, he was farming crops, so... in between sheep-shearing and his other side jobs, he would be on the tractor 'till two or three or four in the morning with plowing, disking, you know, all of it. It was kind of nonstop, so I would be here alone, with nobody in complete darkness because there were no security lights. The first time that I really felt terrified (laughter), he was out plowing, it must have been about midnight, it was pitch dark, and we had an outside dog—a farm dog. And she was standing outside my back door, barking her head off—just scared the life out of me, and I was afraid to do anything! I finally got up the nerve to walk out and I flipped the light on and looked out the door and there was a huge bullfrog out behind the door! (laughter) I felt very foolish, but I have evolved with that over the years too, and yeah, once we started having kids, yeah, it just... yeah. I didn't get so scared, and now I'm fine.

CD: We hosted an exchange student from Germany, and once we got her from the airport out in the country, it was becoming more and more obvious she's very nervous, like "Where's the houses?" (laughter) Well, they're scattered out. And, gee, was it the first night, she wanted to know when the bus would come and take her to town? (laughter)

RD: She said, "What time does the bus come?"

GJE: Where was she going to school here?

RD: Mount Vernon High School.

CD: Yeah. But she was thinking there would be a bus to pick her up to go shopping.

RD: Like they do there, you know, where she'd been, busses came by and took them wherever they needed to go... well, sorry!

CRO: How did she adjust?

RD: She never got used to our lifestyle because she came from a lifestyle where they partied all the time, you know, they were constantly on the go, and we're not and we don't, and I think it was difficult for her to spend a whole year not partying. Our kids did 4-H, and we worked on the farm, you know, we went to church. That was about it.

GJE: That sounds almost like a TV show!

RD: (laughter) absolutely!

CD: And she worked on the farm while she was here, under protest, but she did. You know, there's certain things that needs to be done before supper's on the table! (laughter)

CRO: (laughter) Did you abide by your father's rule? That's what I was going to ask!

CD: Kinda sorta, yeah.

MBW: So what did your kids do on the farm growing up?

RD: Everything. The only thing the girls didn't do was drive anything bigger than a tractor. They would drive the tractor for bailing. I don't know if any of them ever raked, or did anything... They drove for bailing but not very often. Mike and Chuck did most of the... yeah.

Claria: How many children and what do they do?

RD: Six. Michael, actually, we're working him into the farm now so he has half-interest and we're trying to switch it over to him so maybe we can retire in thirty years—who knows! (laughter) So he is married, they have six children together, a combined, a blended family, and they have...

CD: Two, three, and one!

RD: Yes. He had three, she had two, and they have one together. So they have three boys and three girls! And he's farming constantly. He also works and Robertson's Truck Sales in Mount Vernon as his day job, and so they're like five minutes down the road, on our other farm. And Danielle is our second, she is married to a man in the Air Force, and they are in Florida right now, they have three children, they're hoping to come back to Dayton with their final move. Our next daughter, Anne Marie, went to Wyoming for college. She met a man out there who was a rancher from there, so that's where they are rooted now. And they have three children, they're big into the rodeo, and horses, and all of that. He grew up on a ranch and they still do the branding so, that's very much their life. He's an Ag teacher and she does home daycare.

CD: And their five year old can ride better than I can (laughter)

RD: Yes! He can ride better than a lot of people, it's amazing. And then Andy had Down Syndrome, he passed away nine years ago. Veronica, and Jessica, our babies, are twins. Veronica lives in Mansfield, married. And she works at Foster's Pharmacy East Side. And then Jessica is married, expecting her third baby. She did work at Knox Community Hospital, she just quit in January. And her husband is State Patrol and Air Force Reserve. So they're all very close except for the one in Wyoming. We keep hoping that they'll come closer to home, but, you know, that might never happen. The Florida ones will eventually come back to Ohio, so, yeah. We're lucky that they're not all too far away.

CD: But, you know, talk about what the kids done on the farm, what their responsibilities were—it was taking care of the livestock primarily. There was a little bit of operation of farm equipment, which my son done the most of that. But I can remember at one point when Andy was in the hospital, and we had hay to bail out in this field, I had the neighbor helping me, I said "If you unload the wagons, Michael drive the tractor and bailer," and I says, "Myself and the girls will get the hay to the barn and unload it." And I went out to get a load, and I can still see this, clear as day, he's on the far side of the field, and I drove over there, and he got off the wagon, he says "I'm just gonna wait here in the shade," he says, "You've got somethin' up at the

house you need to take care of.” And Michael must have been, well, it was the year Andy was born, so how old would Michael have been?

RD: Michael would have been ten.

CD: Nine or ten... And he was running the tractor and bailer and I says, “What are you talking about?” And I looked up and there’s Mrs. Dudgeon standing out here by the grain bin with her hands on her hips (laughter). And poor Howard’s goin, “You need to go take care of that, I’m just gonna wait out here.” (laughter)

RD: Had my *nine year old* driving the big tractor... (laughter)

CD: So yeah, we did incorporate the kids into farm projects as we seen.

RD: He had some ‘splainin to do over that didn’t ya? (laughter)

CD: Just a little bit.

RD: But they did everything, livestock, the crops, they helped with all of it. When they were growing up, we froze corn, acres of corn, that we had to do, and garden stuff, and they all helped with all of that. Mowing the yard, we used to have push mowers, so we basically would mow all week long. By the time we got done it was time to start again, and every half hour, we, myself and the two older kids, would switch off mowing, ‘cause, ah, they hated that (laughter).

GJE: So what does your family do together now? What are the most important holidays to you and how do you celebrate them? I think we touched on this before the interview.

CD: Yeah, Christmas. They don’t all get home for Christmas and they’ve got extended families and that’s why the one from Wyoming, they alternate every other year, because our daughter’s in-laws are five, six hours away from them. So they gotta make a choice, so it’s every other year. But for the most part, it’s Christmas—It’s pretty busy and noisy.

RD: Yeah. And we’re lucky to get the whole family together one time a year. Just because now all their kids are old enough to be in school, and they’re all doing activities in the summer, and it’s just hard.

GJE: That’s a lot of people to get together.

RD: Yeah, it’s a lot.

CRO: Do they stay here with you, the ones who are coming from away?

RD: Yeah, they usually do.

CRO: Aw.

CD: Yeah, the kids all sleep in a row all across the living room. (laughter)

Rita. Yeah. But it’s fun, for that short time it lasts.

CRO: Absolutely.

MBW: Do you think Knox County has changed a lot since you guys were growing up?

CD: Oh, tremendously. Yeah.

MBW: What are the most visible changes?

RD: For me, visible changes, well, for me, in town, I can tell you when we were growing up, when we were kids, it's like you hear, we went outside and played and Mom would say "Come home when the street lights come on!" And every neighbor around us, if we got out of line, would be right on us. And then they'd be telling Mom, and then we'd get it twice, you know? But now, it's just so different because half the time you're afraid to let your kids go out the door alone without someone with them or watchin' em. And I tell my grandkids that all the time, "Don't go anywhere alone!" You know, "Don't let anybody give you anything! You only pack what's in your lunch!" It's just, there's so much now that you have to be concerned about, with the drugs, and with the trafficking, I mean, all of it. It's just hard to feel safe anywhere but when I was growing up, nothing, and I mean we could be out, my brother and I remember, every Friday night that was when we didn't eat meat on Fridays. We would stay up until midnight so that we could order a pizza with pepperoni on it! And we would go out, the one night, we were out on the end of our street, we grew up on a little alley, and my brother was trying to climb the telephone pole at the end. Just being silly, we were just waiting on our time, and we weren't very old. He might have been fifteen, sixteen. I don't know, and I was four years younger. But then the neighbor lady called my mother the next morning not realizing it was us and she said, "I think there were two drug addicts out there at the end of the street and they were trying to climb that telephone pole!" (laughter) And my mother said, "Oh, you don't say!" Course, she knew it was us, but didn't say anything. Yeah, we could just be safe, you know. There wasn't that fear of someone around every corner, or something lurking somewhere, it just wasn't... it was safer. And it was quieter, it was quiet even in town, you could walk anywhere and do anything without having to worry.

CD: I mean, growing up here in the country, it was very similar. We could walk or ride a bicycle anywhere we wanted to go. I mean, four or five miles away, no big deal at seven, eight, nine years old. That's not gonna happen today. Not happening.

GJE: Is any of the meat you grow here consumed locally? Have you felt the effects of the recent local foods movements like the food shed that opened up in Mount Vernon?

CD: I have opinions on that, and it's going to be maybe not politically correct, but we'll go with them. There is scientific and there is sympathetic. And a lot of the locally grown foods are organic in nature. Which is ok. A lot of the meats that are marketed through that program are organic. Grass-fed. But it's all... This is just my opinion, that is all sympathetic. There is nothing scientific to it. You can not prove or disprove whether GMOs have an effect on health or not. It can't be done. Personally, we'll go to grass-fed beef because everybody says it's the latest and greatest and it's healthier and better for the environment. Strictly grass-fed. How does it taste, honey?

RD: Worst meat we've ever had, we're having a really hard time eating it. It's tough, and it's got

no flavor, it's... we've never been so disappointed. Ever. Ever. And there are people who say they love it, so I don't know, maybe other people feed different grass! (laughter) Or maybe they never had any other kind of beef, I don't know, but this was terrible.

CD: There's the key right there—We have become so accustomed to what is provided to us from an outside source that we don't know what food is supposed to taste like. If I was to go out here and milk a cow and give you a glass of milk, you would probably vomit. Because the fat content in it. But that is what milk is supposed to taste like! Now we have a version where you can pour it in a glass and you can read a newspaper on the other side of it. They've extracted everything out of it, they've extracted all the good bacteria and the enzymes out of it through the processes they put it through to make it safe for us to drink, but our bodies, our internal system, has to have bacteria in there to break it down. And we've got so far from that that all of us is going to the doctor for anything and everything under the sun. So, the local foods thing, I'm not trying to run them down, I'm just saying it's a sympathetic thing and not a scientific thing. I can take cattle and inject them with growth hormones. Which makes them gain weight faster. If I don't give the hormone to this animal here, he's got seven nanograms of the natural hormones to make him grow in that pound of meat. If I give it to this animal here, his meat now has ten nanograms of that same hormone. Put it on a chart, that's a thirty percent increase. Sounds terrible, doesn't it? Agree? thirty percent increase sounds terrible. So you went from seven to ten. Now I'm gonna ask you to eat a head of broccoli. It's got twelve hundred of the same nanograms in that head of broccoli. So is it a bad thing to inject this cattle with hormones? (laughter) I mean, everything is relative to... (a truck pulls into the driveway and drives into the field) I don't have a clue who that is or what they're doing!

RD: Looks like they're with Drew. It's good.

CD: Okay. We'll pretend it is. So everything is relative. And I look to GMOs and GMO-Genetically modified organism. Are you a GMO?

GJE: Not sure, am I?

CD: Well, if you wasn't, you'd look like her! (points to Maria and laughs) Talk about GMOs just for a little bit, you probably don't know where corn actually come from. Many, many years ago, it was called maize. And they modified it and now it become corn. And then we modified it even farther; we've got engine corn, we've got white corn, we've got yellow corn, we've got sweet corn, we've got popcorn. They've all genetically been modified. But in today's world it's a bad thing.

CRO: It's pervasive and it's everywhere.

CD: Yeah, so these things are sympathetic, they're not scientific.

MBW: So do you think there are any dangers to GMOs?

CD: No.

GJE: I know the two usually go hand-in-hand, the anti-GMO and the local foods movement, but it seems like there also is a farmer's market and the emergence of those sort of things, support

for local foods regardless of how it was produced, and you don't think you've seen the effects of that at all?

CD: No.

GJE: Do you think that has to do with the lack of slaughterhouses around here?

CD: A good bit of it does. People really want to feel good about what they're eating. I mean, I could go through this house and find a box of stuff that's all natural. Because it makes us feel good, we're eating something all natural. But is it better for us? It's sympathetic that says it's all natural. So, we go with that, and we can... everything is about belief. If you believe that the all-natural thing is the way to go, then you do feel better. I talked to a fellow cattle producer yesterday, and this is funny, he said, "I just weaned my calves," and he said "They got along this year the best they've ever done." He said, "They don't run around and beller," he said, "They've calmed down, they're eating feed, they're content." Usually when you wean animals you go through a week of discomfort for yourself because they're screaming their heads off till they can't scream anymore. And he says, "I don't know what I done different!" So I looked it up on the internet, and I called him back and I said, "You weaned them at the perfect time of the moon phase." And he's going, "What?" I said, "Yeah, there's a phase of the moon where you wean animals, you wean babies. You nailed it right on the head." He says, "I don't believe in that." I said, "Okay. You don't have to believe in it. But I believe in it, that's the only time I wean animals, I castrate animals, I do it by the sign of the moon and we've got along very very well." So he called me back a little bit later and he said, "Are you sure there's something to this?" I said, "No, I'm not sure about anything," but I said, "Part of it is believing." I said, "You just had a hip replaced, a year ago. And you believed in your mind that it was the best thing for you. And you recovered from it quite well. Now, if you'd went in there with a different mindset of saying, 'This isn't gonna work, I'm gonna be crippled for life,'" I said, "You'd still be limping." So I said, "Believing is the key to everything." And for religion, yeah. If you believe, it works, and if you don't believe it doesn't.

CRO: No, it does! Because you married her! Don't worry! (laughter)

MBW: So what do you think is the biggest problem in this area that needs to be addressed?

CRO: By "this area" meaning Knox County."

CD: For agriculture or just in general?

MBW: Either way.

CD: (pauses) Lack of communication. And that would cover everything.

CRO: Can you explain, in what way?

CD: We really don't want to hear someone else's point of view. We have preconceived notions about everything. And our opinion is the only one that matters. Well, guess what, that's not really true. Just like farming here, I do what I do and that's what I do and that's really none of your business. Well, it is your business.

CRO: Where is this coming from, this attitude, this perspective of not listening, of not caring.

CD: Technology. We are the most intelligent bunch of idiots of people on Earth that's ever been here but yet we're the dumbest, because everything you want is there (points to Clara's iPhone). You can get every answer you want right there. You don't have to put thought process into it, you don't have to experiment with what worked, what didn't. The answer is there at the tip of your finger.

RD: Whether it's right or not, it's there. And that's another big problem.

CD: I seen a cartoon the other day, showed a little boy with a camel biting his head off. And the caption said, "What should mom do, save the boy or take a picture." *That's where we're at today!* We see people in trouble, we don't rush in to help them, "Oh, I've got to get a picture of that! Jude's not gonna believe this when I go to the bar tonight!" We've gotta have a picture of it. We're nuts! Technology has screwed us up, folks! It's a wonderful thing, but we're not using this!

CRO: And we are in our siluses. Fabulous answer.

CD: But I'm biased in some of these opinions because I work in research and development. And I have found out the hard way that I can make the research tell you whatever it is you wanna know. And I can change it for her (points to Rita). The same research I can change to make you happy, because, we'll twist the numbers a little bit. And we do this daily. Daily!

MBW: So, are you optimistic about the future of this county, or farming in the county?

CD: Yes, because that's why we are involved in community support. We get involved with different activities to where we've got some input. Maybe our ideas aren't the best but we try to get them out there and talk about them and help people work through things. All the projects she (gestures to Rita) works on, the interaction I'm in, those are all non-paying activities. But at least we can express our feelings and work through things.

CRO: Be human.

CD: Yes.

CRO: And humane.

CD: Yeah.

GJE: So I think we're about out of time, but if we could close maybe with, if either of you can think of a story that really captures Knox County life or just farm life, I think that'd be a nice thing to go out on.

CD: A quick one, retired Judge Ronk, in our court systems, made a statement the other day, that I was just going, "Wow, I'd never thought about it." He was juvenile judge. He said, "I have never had a young individual in my courtroom that exhibited livestock at the County Fair." He said, "Those kids have a purpose, they know what responsibility is, they know what consequences is."

CRO: Those are the values.

CD: And I find that amazing that I had never put that together. But he said the young people today need to have responsibilities, they need to know what the consequences are if they don't. And he said it's not happening.

MBW: Do you guys have any other closing thoughts, or anything else you think we need to know?

GJE: Any story from you, Rita?

RD: No, he took the good one. (laughter)

CD: Which one was that?

RD: The one you just told. (Chuck laughs) I really can't, I think overall, for the most part, people want to do what's right, they want cohesiveness, they want people to be able to get along, it's just finding that perfect niche where we can all say "Okay, you're right. Okay, I'm wrong on this. Okay, let's do it your way. Sure, I'll help you do that." But we just have to get over that hump. I'm sure we can do that, I mean I know Knox County can do it. They're a great county, and there's a lot of old roots in Knox County, all over, in all of the townships and people who have been here and have raised families for years, and that will last a long time, and they'll get back to their roots and figure it out. Might take a great shaking somewhere, you know, for people to wake up, but what happens happens, and I think it'll all be ok.

CD: We talked to a real estate person the other day, and he said "Real estate in Knox County is booming right now." He said "House comes on the market, it's sold. Just like that." He said, "People that lived in Columbus didn't like all the helter-skelter going on so they moved out to Delaware and to New Albany and Sunberry, and Granville." And he said, "So the people went out, and now we have built malls and shopping centers and infrastructure to satisfy their needs, and they're going, 'Wow, it's too busy here, we're going to move out farther.'"

CRO: Let's go North, or South! (laughter)

CD: So now they're migrating into Knox County more and more, and progress will follow them. So if you'd look at these big towns, there's always a section of town that done great for a long time, and then industry or something pulled out for some reason, and it's a bad community to be in. And every town's gonna go through that, and that is my biggest fear, that these people's gonna come to Knox County, we're going to build more roads, we're gonna build a bypass, whatever you wanna call it, we're gonna build more stores, more shopping malls, and then the people's gonna say, "It's too busy for me, we're gonna move a little farther away." Then these businesses will fail, and then we're gonna be an armpit. (laughter) That's my fear. Every community needs growth, I understand that, but...

GJE: Not that type.

CD: No, no. And I'm sure, from Chicago, you can see areas that were very much the same way.

GJE: Yeah.

CD: You know, fifty years ago, it was probably the best part of town to be in. You had your

shopping, you had your industry, you had housing. And then when industry or the shopping, it just becomes a community you're not safe in. And that's my fear for the county. We've been protected for a long time, or we're set in our ways... I can't even tell you road names, but I can tell you wherever you wanna go how to get there. But that's all gonna change! I'm not sure I'm ready for it.

RD: That is the biggest blessing in the preservation of the farming industry, is that we know this (gestures around the farm and surrounding areas) shall remain. And there will always, you know, always be a little place that food can be grown and safety can be found. So...

CRO: Well, we want to thank you! You are a wise man, and you are a wise woman!