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Interview with Kathy Grassbaugh

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Kathy Grassbaugh

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Interview With Kathy Grassbaugh (Wife and Mother of the Grassbaugh Family)

Thursday 30, 1995. 21461 Schenk Creek Road, Howard OH 43028

AL: I guess we can just start with a little bit of background. Did you grow up on a farm?

KG: No. How high do you want me to talk?

AL: Normal voice is fine.

KG: No I lived in Euclid OH. Do you know where Euclid OH is. Until I was twelve years old. Then we moved to the country in Homerville which is up in Medina county.

AL: And you have been here for how long?

KG: Twenty three years. Or is it twenty four. Twenty four years.

AL: Was it a tough move here? Or was it something you wanted to do?

KG: Well I got married. Well it was at first because I had to leave work, had to leave my friends, family. I moved away from everything.

AL: Did you see yourself living on a farm for the most part?

KG: Oh yeah that never bothered me. We had been...when we moved to the country, which was very country compared to what I started out...where I started out. We belonged to 4H and all that. We lived right next door to a big dairy farm so it was something that we grew up with basically.

AL: So it wasn't something that was difficult to get into once you came here.

KG: No not really.

AL: It wasn't difficult starting? It was something you already kind of knew where to go and what to do?

KG: It's different.

AL: It's different? How?

KG: It was different. Well, it's different whether you are just living there or whether your...it becomes your way of life.

AL: But you were glad for it to become your way of life?

KG: At the time yeah.

AL: You might think differently today?

KG: Might do things differently. I don't know. You never know.

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AL: What were some of the things you did starting out? Some of the things you do now on the farm?

KG: Do now or do then?

AL: Well both.

KG: Didn't do much at first because I was still working and driving 65 miles back and forth to work until...we got married in march and I didn't quit work until the first of may. Because I was greedy.

I took 3 weeks of vacation and in order to get it I had to work until May. And basically unless they needed me for something...At that time we cooked when we had the extra help we fed them then their lunch and if they were working late we took meals to the field and stuff like that. A few times they put me on the tractor.

AL: So then was this something that you kind of learned along the way?

KG: More or less because we never did that at home. I mean we raised animals. Small animals: pigs sheep chickens at home but we never did much farming.

AL: I was asking Dale whether he thought someone was born a farmer or kind of socialized into it or brought up into it. What do you think about that? Do you think it is kind of something that is in your blood and that you have to want to do or is it something more along the lines that if you are brought up in it that is kind of the way you go?

KG: Well I think it can be both. Um...If you are brought up in it most of the time you don't know anything different. Because I think it was in Dale's blood. Because he basically just knew it through family. He didn't know it from his own. So I suppose it can be both ways I suppose. Some people are in it because they always...they have this feeling and I think some are in it because they are raised in it.

AL: Do you think it is more difficult these days for somebody to get involved in farming?

KG: Oh yes.

AL: Why is that?

KG: Um...The financial investment is so. And you know everything has to be done with borrowed money. It isn't like...well when we got married we were paying off bills that Dale had from when he first started with people. And you can't do that now. You have to go borrow it all. And this was like eleven years after he first started that we were still paying those bills.

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AL: So it is harder to borrow money now?

KG: Oh I think you can borrow it if you want.

AL: It's just harder to pay back.

KG: Right. I don't know how hard it is to borrow money as far as someone starting out with nothing. And I think it would be hard for a person.

AL: You think you almost have to have an in to start farming?

KG: Someway I would think.

AL: Or be very wealthy.

KG: Well if you are wealthy why would you buy. You know . I would say you have to have something to go on. I don't know because I don't go borrow money. I just sign the papers. They tell me to sign I sign.

AL: So farming is more, from what I am getting from everyone, more along the lines of a business these days...a venture.... How do you feel about that? When I spoke with Cindy and Anna they both kind of weren't really against that idea. Anna expecially seems very interested in computers and putting everything on computers. Is that anything that bothers you?

KG: What the computers?

AL: No the fact that it's becoming more of a business?

KG: Yes...I mean we have one drawback here. We don't like paper work. Nobody want's to...everybody fights sitting down and doing paper work. We would rather do the work. And it is like one person needs to be either on the phone or doing paperwork just about all the time.

AL: Yeah I have noticed that quite a bit whenever I call here a lot of times the phone is busy.

KG: There are some days when the phone doesn't ring at all and there are some days when it rings all the time. And those days I don't like it. Because it is always bringing you from someplace. But there is you know...of course you know were at a point where it is more a business. I mean you really have to...I used to be you depended on the guys you sold the grain to to worry about keeping on top of the marketing. Well you yourself I think they have to keep on top of the marketing. It's....You have to be on top of so many things. And it's...and remember so many things and watch so many things. Everybody is on you all the time.

AL: Dale reiterated that with his saying that a farmer always has to keep looking forward and can't afford to look back. Why do you think that it has become so much of a business? Could you have seen it moving in any other direction?

KG: I really don't know but I think maybe the one thing that...and we have always talked about this...but whenever the milk prices go down the always...the only thing we're told is to operate more efficiently. So you have to keep operating. Figuring out how you can bring in the same amount of dollars and consequentially I think things, places just keep getting bigger and bigger. To bring in the same amount of dollars. Because you need so much to operate on and when you don't know what your paycheck is going to be...and we don't...we have to take what they give us more or less. We have no control over our income. And I think that is why things have gotten to where...you know...most people that are trying to make a living without outside income have gone from 20, 50, cows to where they are milking 100, 200, 1000, 14000. And that is big business. That's...but you have to in order to keep.

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AL: You always have to keep getting larger?

KG: It seems like it. They keep telling you that.

AL: You can't stop anywhere.

KG: I would like to go the other way.

AL: And get smaller?

KG: And get smaller. But it is hard to pencil out. Because when you get bigger...then...it just makes more work. I don't know. It's an occupation now that I don't feel you feel that people appreciate the time and the energy that they put into the work. What all goes into it. And if you try to keep things looking nice you get...it's hard. A lot of hours. A lot of times. It has it's good points and it's bad points. We can't always go to the things that we want to go to. But we can take off on a rainy day and do things. You know if there are other things we take off on a rainy day and go.

AL: So there are advantages?

KG: Oh yeah there are advantages.

AL: What would you say some of the most common ones are?

KG: The advantages?

AL: Some of the ones that are most familiar to you.

KG: Well I kind of think that around here they like being there own boss. Being in control of what you do. Being your own...well we say being your own boss. In a way you are your own boss, in a way your not because everybody is always telling you what you can do and what you can't do. It's getting worse it is this environmental stuff that keeps getting worse. I think they like picking on the little guy. They know they can controll us because the little guy doesn't...

AL: The little guy doesn't...

KG: We don't have enough money to fight back all the time.

AL: Or as many lawyers.

KG: So you just try to do things to keep them happy. I suppose that's a type of freedom. I dont...I like living in the country.

AL: It's pretty.

KG: but you have to take the good and the bad. You can't have everything living in the country. That it what so many people coming out of town want. They want everything. Got to take the dust and the dirt and the...

AL: The rain..

KG: And all that stuff. You live on a dirt road you got to take the dust. Course we are in a good place.

AL: Why is that?

KG: Being close to..we are located pretty good being close to town and stuff like that. It isn't like some of them say they only go shopping once a month or something like that because they have to travel a hundred miles to town or something like that. Well we are only 10 minutes from town. So it's...I think we are in a nice, basic good location other then the traffic over the last 5 years that we have gotten. It makes it very dangerous. Very dangerous for working up on 36. Scary. And it has been good raising the kids. They always have something to do. When they were little you were able to keep them busy most of the time. But still it is very dangerous. Since things have gotten so mechanical. It's not like what you see in the movies where you go to grandpa's farm and he has a horse and a cow and chickens and stuff like that. You have to be pretty careful.

It's very dangerous. With the machinery and stuff that we have now. It is dangerous. But I think the kids with the little things that they operate. Rider lawn mowers and gator and stuff like that...I think it makes them better drivers. Easier to learn how to drive. Because they start out at a young age. You know. So teaching them how to drive hasn't been hard. Because most of them know the basics. It's scarry some times. I mean I think the kids have an advantage there over town kids who have never had the opportunity to drive anything other than a bycicle. I think it helps them.

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AL: You were saying with the machinery that is is becoming more dangerous. It seems like it is also becoming more technical.

KG: Oh yeah.

AL: Do you think it is a lot harder to become a farmer as far as what you need to know these days too?

KG: Well you have to be on...you know just like what we discussed before you have to really be...you have to be up on so many things. You can't just...you know like Dale said when he started farming

he'd go to town and get a bag of seed and a bag fertilizer, when he finished up that you'd go get more. Now you have to order everything ahead of time. It's all done a year ahead of time. You have to have your chemicals and your spray and all that stuff. It all has to be done and prepaid for. Before you didn't you paid it after you had it. Now you have to pay for it before you get it and it's expensive. But the...well it isn't so much the...I mean things you don't think of. Like um, oh when the kids were little Dale used to take them out when they were unloading corn and stuff like that when they were out there with them. When he'd come in he'd set them up in the gravity wagon, and not think anything about it and the kids would hold on to the ends. Well one time Dwayne kind of went with the flow of the corn. Well we almost lost him. Dale did manage to get him out. But you know back...you get caught in that and you can't hardly come out. His boot was stuck and went up through the alder and everything and that could have been him you know. So no more of that. That was the end of that. And you don't think of things like that. Everything with those things could just happen that quick. Because I never...when the kids were little very seldom did I leave them outside alone.

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AL: Too many things to get into....

KG: Too many things to get hurt on. Not necessarily getting into. But too much to get hurt on. Too much traffic going in and out of the driveway. But I don't do much. I mean...I shouldn't really say that should I. I don't do much outside. I can't tell you how they get it all done. But if they need me for anything. Hauling somebody from one farm to the other, chasing cows. I do that. And really there is enough help. When the kids got old enough to work there really was help and they helped after school and weekends and stuff. I used to help milk and stuff, needed two people in the parlor, no we don't need two people in the parlor.

AL: What was it like raising 5 kids? I imagine it was quite trying at times.

KG: I suppose it wouldn't be any different then raising five kids in town. I mean when they were little. When they got old enough where their Dad thought they would be outside that got to be...make them do it. The biggest thing with the kids was...we don't get to do what our friends in town get to do. We always have to work. But they...the boys themselves didn't do much. As far as sports and that. They could if they wanted too. Now the girls did. The girls did their sports and stuff. We had our fun times just like everybody. Course the kids don't remember this. But when they were

little when I used to have to take the meals to the fields, they used to have good times. We'd have fun times with it, I mean it was a picnic like. But that was only...we didn't do much after the first two...they started just making it a point to come in. Or we packed a sack and sent it. But it was probably more fun at times.

But it was just more or less family. Just doing things. I climbed walls at times. Usually you were here with...I was here most of the time with four little kids. Maybe that explains why I am the way I am today. Dale would come in and I would have the television on and ask why you have the television on for. Well I just want to hear an adult voice once in a while.

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AL: Did you try and raise them to stay on the farm or did you kind of encourage them to do things off the farm as far as occupations? Did you kind of expect them to go into agriculture and farming?

KG: No we really didn't in fact we tried to talk them into trying something else. Just like Doug. His whole life he said he just wanted to come back and farm. Of course he didn't put studying at the top of his list because he wasn't concerned with doing anything once he got out of high school. We tried to talk him into a technical school or something like that just so he would have something else behind him. Get a job some place else. See what it's like. But we didn't succeed did we? I mean Dwayne did go to school so he had a little bit of other experience. But I think they need to go away from the farm to work in order to be content with it. You know they have to make up their minds whether you want to spend the rest of your life in it. We tried to encourage them to try something different but this is all they know. And it is hard.

AL: May be something that your kind of born to love, and that grows on you.

KG: Well I think you can like it or you can hate it...really dislike it. Some of them say they don't want to have nothing to do with it. Now I am really surprised Anna has gotten so, even though...she was always good at doing the milking. But I am kind of surprised she still want's to stay in agribusiness.

AL: You say agribusiness. What do you mean by that?

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KG: Just getting into an occupation that is agriculture related. But see that goes back to the old. Something they are familiar with.

AL: Are there things that scare you a little about them going into

farming?

KG: Well the only thing that...the same thing that ever since they were little. The dangers right now...the traffic and you know. You just never know how people are going to pull out in front of you. I mean granted we have more turn signals...are buying tractors with cabs on them...stuff like that. But there is a lot of things they need to watch out for that the boys won't do. They are supposed to be wearing stuff on there ears to protect there hearing.

AL: But they don't wear them?

KG: No they don't. And you think what they go through with their Dad they would do it.

AL: It is the same thing with all those rock musicians and stuff. They are supposed to be wearing stuff too.

KG: And it does affect your ears. I mean Dale has an awful time sometimes understanding what the kids are saying.

AL: My Dad was in the airforce for a while and so he has some problems with that too. The jet engines and stuff.

KG: Now see Dale was never, they wouldn't take him in the service because of his hearing.

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KG: There are days when nothing happens and days when everything goes wrong.

AL: There is a lot to do here.

KG: I try to be around if somebody needs me but just raising thte kids.

AL: It's a full time job.

KG: And the kids have been my main thing and that....we have always had hired help most of the time. And as long as everything is going all right....

AL: And raising the kids is a full time job. I know my mom basically stayed home with me and my brother and now I have a 12 year old brother. She always seems to be driving him somewhere or doing something with carpool and that. So it's definitely a full time job.

KG: Well it changes. When the kids are little. You know it's just like....now that the boys are working with their father, it's a whole different...let's say atmosphere. I mean you have a whole different set of problems that you have to deal with. And whether it...the biggest thing now is whether they can...work this out. I mean what you have to do is think about you and your Dad and your brother going into business together.

AL: It would be difficult.

KG: It's difficult. It's very difficult. And I didn't realize it would be as hard as what it is.

AL: Just having three...even somewhat different opinions I would think would be difficult.

KG: And I think it would make a difference maybe if we were younger.

AL: How so?

KG: Well if Dale was approaching 50 instead of 60 there would be ten years where he would think that they would be working together before he was thinking about maybe stepping down from where they and maybe getting out. But see like now were thinking about getting out and the decision has to be made by twenty year olds. You know are you ready to put everything at stake to invest the money and take over what your father has built up. Are you ready to assume that responsibility. Where I don't think they are ready to. I think they just want to work for someone else. And it is a big decision for a twenty year old's to have to make. As to whether they want to step in. And take over this thing that we have built here. I mean you work your life to build something up and then you have to figure out what to do with it. Because things aren't the way when we started out. I mean we put in because it was our investment for our retirement. But we cannot sell it right now and have anything left over for retirement. It's....I mean it is another one of those things that you have to do a lot of figuring.

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AL: Dale was mentioning that too.

KG: And that is the point that we are at now. Even with still having the older kids and everything. Ten years makes a...10 years basically will make a lot of difference. The boys want to expand more. Dale doesn't want to do the investing. I guess the problem is he has seen to many people where the father invested all this money because the boys decided to come home and the boys did not do so. And that

father loses everything.

AL: He just has to make sure everything is very secure before he leaves.

KG: Well before you do the expansion they have to want to take on the financial responsibility of it. I mean jsut like for them to build the barn they want to build...they are going to have to have...invest between 3 and 4 hundred thousand dollars.

AL: He has to make sure that they really want to stay.

KG: They have to make sure. And that's the...you know you think you get passed all the hurdles and now were in a different one. how to work things out. It gets to be fun at times. If you werent taping this I'd tell you.....

AL: So would you say farming is a life long investment?

KG: Oh yes. You get in it and then you don't know how to get out. When you get in it like we are here. With the investment. And I think when you are a dairy farm it make s a difference. I mean if we were just grain farming we wouldn't have the asset investment that you have when you have a dairy farm.

AL: More financial....

KG: You have more invested. And you have more things that can't just be sold. I mean ok if you are grain farming you have your tractors and your field equipment and stuff like that. You can sell that without much...or if something happens to somebody it can your fairly set. I mean here weve got...what do we milk 150...so we probally have around 400 animals around that have to be taken care of. And if something would happen, you know that all has to be liquidated. And your investment is so terrible. I mean we have more invested here then our local K-Mart and Walmart probally and that's hard to belief that you could have more investment than a store. Now maybe Walmart's bigger maybe it has...by the time you add everything up...And it's just you know. A dairy farm is just hard because you have more assests and it's just harder to sell things off. If you wanted to get out without the government. Without having to pay most of everything in taxes.

AL: And it's also a daily thing here with milking...

KG: It's seven days a week 14 hours a day. Even on Sunday. We haven't

figured out how to be able to take a holiday. But you chose that life you choose it. And it is hard to find people that are willing to work anymore. Dealing with hired help and hiring help is hard.

If you like to farm and do the work it is hard to get into it's hard to accept the business or to be bothered with it...the business end of things like hiring help. When we have to hire help it gets...unless you enjoy that type of thing you know. You like doing the paper work. The business work and don't like doing the physical labor. Which just about everybody needs right now.

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AL: Where do you see farming going in the future?

KG: I don't know.

AL: You don't know.....

KG: I don't like the idea of getting bigger and bigger. I guess I like the point we used to be at. I don't even like it that we have gotten this big. It is almost like the fun of doing some of the things has been taken out because you are under so much pressure.

But they say bigger bigger big...that's the thing. Just get bigger bigger. Now of course everything has it's cycles. Now whether that will cycle around I don't know. I(mean everything around here has changed so much so fast I'd say in the last 5 years. It just seems like things have just....10 years...Everybody all the sudden wants to move to the small towns and drive to the big towns to work. People are coming in here left and right driving back and forth to Columbus to work every day. It is really changing fast. And you have to be diversified. Of course some of them are going where they just...you watch these farm programs the other morning they had a couple that moved from California to Idaho. They are milking cows.

Well all they do is milk cows. They don't do anything else but milk cows. And they were talking how all they own is a hundred acres.

Course if you do that then you don't have the investment of all the machinery that we have.

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AL: But then you also depend on other people for you feed and your grain.

KG: Yes. You have to depend on other people for all your feed. For everything. And I don't know. I myself don't know which is the best way to go. I don't know how it will...I don't know how these big huge dairies will be interesting to...I mean some of them are really...you read the stories in these farm magazines and some of them it's interesting. But what's more interesting is they still call them family farms.

AL: That's something that everyone seems to be running into is trying to define what a family farm is. It doesn't seem like you can anymore.

KG: Well I think that for some you know they want all the benefits of the small farm but they want all the benefits of big business too. With some of them basically they are controlled...I don't know how they can call them family farms. One guy that milks those 14,000 cows and operates his own farm.

AL: Just one more question. First is there anything that you want to say that you have been dieing to say but I haven't asked. Because sometimes people have something and they are just waiting for the question to be asked.

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KG: It's interesting like there are some times...I don't know when you talk about family. I think some times maybe we are too family. Dale and I have talked about that. Maybe we spend to much time together sometimes. I mean most people don't even know what it's like to sit down together and eat a meal as a family. Lot of times we have three meals a day together. We work together. We spend the majority of the time. And I just wonder sometimes if we spend to much time together. I don't know whether you can. We have talked about that though. If you can be too together.

AL: I don't know I think the fact that you have held it together all this time and you have been this close says something to you having done a good job.

KG: You think it. Does it look better from the outside then we feel from the inside. Maybe we have to sit back and...if you could look at yourself from the other side. Instead of what you think. I mean from this way if you could look at it in another way. Oh I don't think we would change anything. I don't think we would probally do it any different. It depends on what kind of humor were in, what day it is, what has happened as to how we feel. There are some days when we wish we felt like we could take a vacation and feel like this is your two weeks to do it. But if somebody doesn't show up to work and your heading out the door, then you change your plans fast. I mean it's...and every time we leave something goes wrong. Not that...with the boys working here and that it is hard to go to family things together.

AL: You always have to leave somebody.

KG: Yeah. If things don't take place around noon. Somebody usually

can't go. I mean because in order to go to my family things we have to allow an hour or something traveling time. And it's...some times you get depressed there because...people who get there weekends off and holidays off, paid vacations and hospitalization and they don't understand when we say well we can't...I can't eat at 2 o'clock because at 3 o'clock we have to be at the barn. We can't have the late dinners. We have to have the earlier ones. And it's hard to deal with those things. I very seldom did get to go to much that my side of the family has because most of my relatives are in Cleveland. One thing I don't feel like getting in the car and driving on the interstates. It takes a couple hours to get there.

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AL: I guess just finally. It looks like this project has...initially I said it was going to be a three year project. Now it is something that it looks like the school might try to continue long term actually.

KG: What are they going to do long term just keep you talking to people.

AL: yeah. Just to keep the connections and support for the community. I really couldn't tell you but it is just something that they would like the college to be connected with. I think a lot of people like the fact that the college is starting to get more involved in the community and surrounding area because I think for a long time...Initially when Kenyon was here it used to be an air force base.

KG: An air force base...Oh I haven't heard that one.

AL: Along time ago I think it used to be air force training. Since it wasn't invovled in the community and now it is starting to be.

KG: I think the history and background of Kenyon. Some of that is...how much land the college actually did own around here. I think up there where the girl scout is was connected with Kenyon some way or another.

AL: If you could say anything to people who don't know much about farming what would you say?

KG: Some good things, some bad things. Some times I just there's things that are upsetting. I don't know. I don't think people...I just want to say to some go back to the city. I don't really know. I guess it would probally depend on the subject. Right now I just, the biggest thing I think are all these groups that are trying to

tell you what to do. They get on us about everything. And I think what upset me was all that erosion that took place when they were building that shopping center and stuff. And if that had been one of our farmers that had let that erosion take place they would have had him in jail or something...or fined. They watch everything we do. And most...I am not going to say all, but most are taking care of the land the best they can. I mean our land and our animals are probably fed better than we are. The majority of the American people because all that stuff is measured. I mean it's all. And they wouldn't knowingly abuse the land because they have to make a living off of that land. And if we abuse it were not going to make our living. I mean those of us that are full time depend on what that land produces in order to survive. And I think now, I mean at this...It seems like you know you have to watch everything. I mean you can't shoot the wild turkeys even though they eat up your crops because...you know between the endangered species, the environmental this and the environmental that...you know it's...they won't let you. I mean they want to control everything that we do but we still have to pay the taxes and all that. I mean it's just like these waterways. What do you buy land for when you have animals. For the water for them to drink. Now your not supposed to that your supposed to fence all your waterways and grass them down and pipe water to the animals. And just before you do anything like clear a little piece of land you have to clear it through all the little...I mean even like watching...And so many of these groups they contradict themselves. They want they animals out on the ground, they don't want them housed in buildings but then you are supposed to fence the waterways so that they can't get into the waterways and stuff like that....But I think most farmers care. But if you are going to be...everything has to be...and with the threat of being put in jail if you don't....they wanted all of them to wear if they were spraying these suits like the astronauts wear...They had em...it's all somebody sitting at a desk some place the majority that are trying to keep their job....so they have to think of things and one of them was this garb they wanted to wear while they were spraying. Well you could hardly move when they showed them. It hasn't gone through yet. They tried to but they didn't get it done. You could hardly move in the stuff. And then they give you a whole list of...the EPA or the Ohio saftey....OSHA...they had a whole list of things you had to carry with you when you are spraying and if someone would happen to go by and see you spraying and stop and check on it and if you didn't have all this stuff in the truck...you could be fined and put in jail.

AL: Crazy....

KG: Oh yeah they'll put our local farmers in jail but they won't...they can't keep the criminals off the street.

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