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Interview with Troy Cooper

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Troy Cooper

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CM: Today is the 1st of November, 2000, this is Chris Meyers interviewing Troy Cooper, Ohio State University Extension agent for Knox County. We're in his office on Harcourt Rd. in Mt. Vernon Ohio. The time is approximately 1:30 p.m. Could you begin by talking to me about the basic types of food produced by farmers in Knox County.

TC: Ok we've…it's kind of hard to know where to begin. Ah, briefly now because we could spend quite a bit of time, but ah Knox County is quite diverse in what it is able to and thus produce. We'll start off with the livestock industry. Knox County is the number one, er is in the one or top one or two counties in the state for sheep production. We produce a lot of lamb, we have one of the more…we're the largest lamb market in the state, and even east of the Mississippi. We're a very central location, we ah…so we produce a lot of lambs, and we're centrally located to Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Chicago, um…Detroit, and then the eastern seaboard, where the majority of the lamb is consumed in the county, so that's why we're so pivotal in that area. In that…and we have some beef cattle grown in this county, um, ah – their numbers are declining slightly, but we do have, have that, we have…we are the 11th largest producing county in the state for…milk. Last year in '99 we were, produced over 108 million pounds of milk and most of our market for our milk here in Ohio is in the cheese industry. And I think most of it is consumed within the state or processed within the state for as far as our milk goes. They…we have several plants, um…the names have just left me and um, but they are produced for milk and ice cream…and cheese, are the big markets there. We have a few hogs. Our number…hog numbers are declining rapidly, we just have a few ah, that grow hogs here in the county. Ah, a little bit of goat production, not much there, though. Our horse industry is increasing though, not for meat market it's more for pleasure. Um…As far as, as forages go, we are the fourth with 30,000 acres in hay production. So we're the fourth largest county in the state of Ohio. Just to feed all these livestock members, so we do have corn and beans, are our major crops. This year, for corn was a record production year, um, we set an all time high of 152 bushels per acre, for corn, which is phenomenal for this, for this area. Ah, soybeans were almost 40 bushels per acre, and several thousand acres of, of beans grown in this county. And then you start getting into all the little, ah offshoots. We have a few orchards; we have quite a few orchards. There's a few apple, mostly apple orchards we have here in the county. Um, we have some…one person who ah, is doing wine…grows wine. Both a little bit of grape, and mostly apple wine. Um, we have some strawberry patches, lots of people growing pumpkins, and Indian corn for the fall season…we have a few acres in there. We have, there's one farm that I'm aware of, ah, that grows blueberries – actually there's three farms that I can think of that grow blueberries. And quite large, anywhere from three to six acres worth of blueberries. And I don't know if you know much, but three acres of blueberries is a lot (laughter)…is a lot of blueberries. It's a lot of blueberries. Um, we have ah, did I mention strawberries, if I didn't we'll put strawberries on here again. A few people doing strawberries. So we just, ah we have some honeybee growers…they use to pollinate the orchards. They kinda work in a symbiotic relationship to pollinate apple trees and other

fruit trees and then they get the honey out. So, as you can see, we go from, from bees to pumpkins in what we grow in Knox County.

CM: You mentioned ah, a fair amount of change…

TC: Yes

CM: …ah going on in terms of in terms of, ah, suggesting that some…that agriculture at least and possibly some livestock is moving in a particular direction. I don't know if you could tell me a little more about like…

TC: Ok, say 50 years ago, the makeup of…the largest makeup of our county as far as agricultural dollars came from livestock. So one of the rudimentary changes that we've seen is the shift from being, a majority of our, the income dollars coming from livestock based operations to your grain operations. Corn and soybeans are just, far surpass us as far as total dollars revenue brought in, and that's just going to continue to increase. Um, we have seen the size of our farms increase, but the number of farms decrease. So there is…we're in kind of an expansion mode, those…they're either getting bigger and staying in and becoming more efficient, hopefully. Or they're having to fall out…we've seen a reduction in the number of our, our dairies has decreased. Um, at one time in the state of Ohio, there were ten million sheep raised – in the state of Ohio alone. There, there isn't two million head in the whole entire United States. So you see a dramatic shift in that industry, um. So you…it's just a general trend downward. The one increase we are seeing is in these small fruits – the strawberry, the blueberry. People moving out from the city, buying a little bit of land, and they're starting to grow things, just on a small scale. So you…

CM: Why do you think it's the specialized things…

TC: awwe

CM: …the blueberries and strawberries would be more successful?

TC: People perceive it as easy…um…less labor intensive. You see animals and you think how gotta be with them seven days a week 365 days a year, and it's true. But their also surprised when they get into the blueberries and strawberries how much work it is. Now, you can leave them…they don't need to be fed necessarily every day, but there are intensive times of the year where they require a lot of attention. And it surprises people, but they, they just like, I think they like the feel of it. They're trying to get back to their roots, their, a wholer lifestyle, I think that's what they're relating it to.

CM: Um, I guess in terms of…you mentioned there are times of the year that are, that are busier than others.

TC: Mmm hmm.

CM: In terms of what's produced, do you see certain times of the year when, ah, there is a lot of output of food in general from the county…

TC: Mmm hmm

CM: …and, and certain times when there's nothing at all?

TC: Well, um, right now September through November is a big harvest time for your, for your grain products: your corn and soybeans are, this is the time of year that they are harvested, so there's a lot of production…they're, they're coming out of the fields. This is the time that everything is harvested. The same would be true for your cattle and your sheep. Because most of your calves and your lambs are born in the, in the spring, and there's, so there's a glut of them in the fall. And, so you just transpose that six months in advance next, early next spring there will be few…your, your… fewer numbers of, of lambs and calves available than right now. Ah, pigs are a little bit different, cause they can, they have them on a schedule, and their pretty consistent, they try and remain consistent. So…fruits and vegetables are the same, on during the summer, not much available during the spring.

CM: So with all the…changes going on, ah, what are some of the major problems that you see farmers have…ah you mentioned some farmers having to get out, some growing, growing bigger, um what do you think are the, the major issues that are….

TC: The increasing operating costs, decreasing revenues…and there's um…the competitiveness – the loss of markets. We're a global market, and it's difficult for some people to, to compete in a global market. It's hard for them to find that market, and run everything right so that they can do that.

CM: But you do think that there's a possibility to grow and not become commercial?

TC: Yeah, oh yeah, I do. Um, I, I'd like to see the local consumption of food. I think there's a demand for it. As I've been here, I've been in Knox County 3 years, and I've seen this stately increase, and maybe I'm just more aware of it, I don't know. But it seems to me that there…people…there is a, a trend that people would like to know where their food is grown – they want to have it local, they know it's fresh, and so they, they'd like to do that.

CM: Who do you think ah, is buying the food, if it is ah, distributed locally?

TC: Locally?

CM: …that type of market…

TC: Ah, as far as what age group?

CM: Yeah…um, any demographic…

TC: Any demographic? Um, I think you're…an age group, you're seeing your, your mid age to old age upper generations. They have the most disposable income, and of course they're the ones that are raising the families, and so I think those who are, generate, or are consuming most of it, and have the most interest. Ah, again your middle to upper income, for the most part, although you do see college age students showing an interest – especially nowadays. They have an interest, they just typically have less disposable income, and, and they're into that, quick and fast and easy right now. But, there is some interested generated there.

CM: Um, how, how much do you think income plays a part in what people can buy and in what they want to buy?

TC: Um, I think it, it plays a part. Because if you have, if you have a steady income that, is, is comfortable, then you're able to say, 'ok, this may be grown locally and it may cost me just a little bit more, but it's worth it.' And I know why…where it's from, who'd grown it, and I, and then they are able to do that.

CM: So you feel that locally distributed foods will definitely cost more than your typical supermarket foods…

TC: Well…not necessarily, not necessarily. In, in some instances it can, and will. But that's part of the position that I have, is I have to help these producers so that they can produce it at the least cost that they can. They make it affordable – the more affordable they make it for more people, the more they're going to be able to sell. So there is…they can produce it fairly cheap, but again, if you just look at the economics. Large…you reduce your cost per unit, and if, if they're on a small scale then it is, it does cost a little bit more to raise it, in most instances.

CM: Do you think you could go into some detail for me, um, on the economics that ah,

TC: sure…right off the top of my head…

CM: not…(crosstalk) just in terms of the economic issues that face these farmers

TC: ok

CM: In terms of how that would work…

TC: Ok…Um…I'm trying to think here. Hopefully this will be a good example for you. If you're, if you're buying seed, and you're, and if you're ordering out of a catalog, they sell it in increments of a certain amount of quantity. And the lower the quantity, the higher the price. So, if you have more ground, then you, and you're planting more, then your cost of your seed is, in itself is going to go down. If you're using, um, fertilizer…same, same thing applies. The cost per unit goes down per acre. If, you have a hundred acres of pumpkin or corn or whatever it is, your cost may be, may be fifty

cents an acre, whereas if you were only spraying two acres, it's gonna be multiplied. So…your labor to get it off cause you just have fewer acres, it costs more per unit than it would if you have may count up a harvest.

CM: And where do you think, after food leaves the farms, um…it seems to be at least going through a few hands.

TC: Yeah…

CM: Um…I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about the path that food takes after it leaves the farm.

TC: Ok…for our livestock, our meat animals, most of our slaughterhouses, because there are so few in this country, um, they are going to Michigan, Pennsylvania, Kansas, they're having to be shipped back to there to be slaughtered. And then from there, it just, so they're from here back within an area, and then they're being processed there, shipped to storage wherever they were purchasing in, and then there is still some more, um, ah, cutting up, and making available those different cuts, even at a grocery level. So they're going through one, two…they're going through an auction yard, one, two, three, four or five hands before they're getting to the consumer, in some instances. That's just for me…that doesn't count in the grain, and I couldn't tell you too much about that.

CM: Oh, that's ok that. That's fine. Um, do you…what do you see ah, economically in terms of what, I mean every hand it goes through, taking money out. Is there a significant cost added?

TC: I couldn't tell you what the costs are…but everyone takes their cut. Everybody takes their slice of the pie, and…unfortunately, and this is where I see it, this is kind of the shame of it all, is that the person who grew it gets the least…the smallest portion of the pie. That's what really is disturbing, is they've put in most of the…and they aren't able to determine their prices. That's something else I'm not, I don't care for. People who sell their corn and their beans and their livestock, they take them in, whatever people bid on, they take, they take the price. That is so different than any other business in this country. You, the people who produced it, they set the price. They say this is how much it cost me, this is how much profit I'm making – they set their own price, and farmers and livestock producers can't do that. And so that's…they're taking, they're at the beck and whim of people and of what they want to give them. And so, keeping it local, they can determine, I think, they have more control over the price. Now, the competition, and what people are willing to pay sets a limit, but they're able to say…they can look at how much it costs them and say to make a profit I have to get this much. And they're able to do that. And that's what I like about local consumption.

CM: How much food do you think, right now, is staying inside the county?

TC: Um…not very much. Not very much at all.

CM: Where do you see it travelling to?

TC: Um…I'd like to see it go up, to be honest with you. Um, and that's kind of a hope that I have, is to see more of it generated within…locally. Whether through schools, through hospitals, through universities and colleges – wherever we can get it, I'd like to see more of it going. And we *can* do it; we just have to figure out a way *to* do it.

CM: So right now, do you see most of the food staying at least inside Ohio?

TC: No…again, we're …we're on…we're such a small state whole-scheme. You look at all the types of foods that are imported and processed from Del Monte and all your beans and your carrots and your tomatoes to the processed and ready…microwave ready foods. We're small. Most of it's going out of the state, out of the county.

CM: So anything that *is* inside the county…where do you see that being sold?

TC: Oh…where do we see it being sold? Directly to consumers. We have some roadside markets, um, Howard…you know about the homegrown catalog, and the farmers market was started this summer. And so it's going…it's going to people in our county at all levels.

CM: And do you see a relative amount of success in what is being sold in the county?

TC: Um…considering that really this has been the first year that some emphasis and focus have been pushed…put on it, I think it's been great. Um…I think we had an average of 20-24 or thereabouts of sellers at our farm market. And, it looks like, for those who have a little bit more qual…or quantity, they sold a little bit more and at the market. They were averaging $100 dollars a week…some of the people who came didn't have much, they were sold out in ten minutes, but everyone sold out every week. And everyone was satisfied with the quality that they were getting, and…and people were repeat buyers. There was one guy who sold I think every week at the farm market, and when the market finally shut off, he was still getting calls of people putting orders for his products. So it continued on…it didn't stop when the market ended.

CM: And what time…what types of foods are being sold at the farmers market?

TC: We had…we had apples and peaches, flowers, baked goods, some um vinegars were sold, some blueberries, pork, beef, eggs, cheese – both organic and otherwise…otherwise produced. Some lamb…every kind of vegetable you can imagine. Corn was a big one for awhile. Honey. So we had about it all.

CM: Did you see any change in what the local farmers were planting based on their knowledge that the farmers market was coming?

TC: Yes…um, actually they didn't really know it was coming this year, but they were already plans on how…what they were going to do next year differently. Now what

types of things they *were* going to grow. Um…something that was…began to show this demand and…and supply and demand – tomatoes were in hot, they were in hot demand in the first part of June, and no one had them. They'd come to the farm market expecting to find tomatoes, but there were none. So people who could find a way to produce and sell tomatoes in June and May aren't going to make…the demand is there. About August, everyone had tomatoes, and so the demand kind of went down. It was still there, but, ah, the supply was up and the demand was met.

CM: So do you think it's possible to make certain changes in the farm…type of farming that you're doing to accommodate a certain demand at a certain time of year?

TC: Yes, yes. And for tomatoes, put up a greenhouse and you can grow hydroponic tomatoes. We do have someone in the county who does that, and does a very good job of that. But he's got his market still not defeating this farm market, so there's still room for that...yeah. You just, that's just something we have to…as we see the needs I'll try and help them. Whoever they can try and work with, and that's what I'd like to do.

CM: So you think that's possible with livestock too, in terms of a seasonal demand…

TC: Oh you bet.

CM: …in terms of altering when you can distribute certain types….

TC: mmm hmm. It's easier with some species than others. Cattle can be produced about year round. They can have calves and you can buy…you can find calves or you can feed them and sell them out and have them ready to go on every month of the year. Sheep are a little harder. Um, but it can be done. Actually right now, the national sheep industry is trying…is offering more incentives. They want more producers to produce out of season. Um, but you have some physical barriers with sheep. They only breed…they only cycle – the females only come in heat and are receptive in the fall. But there's some breeds that don't, and there's other things you can do to do that, so that's what I'm trying to do.

CM: So in order to ah, for a farmer to change their system, it sounds like it would have to go through some deal of trouble in changing things.

TC: It takes, yeah…especially with livestock it takes a great amount of effort, and sometimes a lot of time. You can't just say, 'oh, I don't like it this way, we're going to do it this way', and have it changed immediately. It takes a progressive…a lot of time. Vegetables…fruits and vegetables, yeah you can. You can change it in a years time. You can change what you're going to grow next year, right now, and not a problem.

CM: So what do you think it would take to encourage farmers to change so that they could distribute based on the market that exists.

TC: I think that they have…need to be shown that there can be money to be made. And that there is a market out there – there are consumers who are willing to do it…what are those avenues? Helping them develop those markets so that they can sell that food to them. And once they're shown that there is a market, and that there is money to be made, they'll do it.

CM: So what do you think are some of the benefits of having some type of local food network? You hinted at it a few times…

TC: Well, you've alluded to it that you don't change hands, it goes basically from directly from producer to consumer. So there's not…all the middle men are cut out, and it's fresh, and it's more nutritious, it has more value to it, um…it also is building relationships between the consumer and buyer…er the producer, which I think is good.

CM: So, do you think that there is a possibility for something like this to exist in Knox County based on the type of food is being grown here, based on the market that we have here.

TC: I hope so…that's kind of where I'm putting some emphasis.

CM: Could you tell me a little bit about what you're doing?

TC: Well, as Howard and I had talked before about the homegrown and eventually tapped into more of our institutional markets – our rest homes, our hospitals, and that. I've had some phone calls from some of these local institutions showing an interest in figuring out a way of purchasing locally grown products, whether it be fruits and vegetables, and/or meat and so we're just in the very, very initial stages of trying to lay the groundwork, and I'm working…we'll work with the commodity groups. My livestock commodity groups, and then our farmers market with these people who have done this – we want them involved in this so that they feel an ownership in it, and they have a say.

CM: Can you tell me a little bit about what a livestock commodity group is?

TC: It's just a group of people that, um, raise the same type of animal. We have a sheep commodity group. The sheep producer in this county, they, they ah, they are trying here to help promote the goodness and that good aspects of their livestock species. Yeah – sheep and cattle and dairy and a swine group. They are involved in educational opportunities, they both for youth and people. They want to help educate people and show the benefits of it – they do it at the fair, they do it at Ag. and awareness day that I have in the springtime, and other opportunities they take to educate people about it. And they also help educate each other – by sponsoring educational programs through our office, or some other organization to help them become better producers. So I'll…that's what I mean by a livestock commodity group.

CM: And you see the possibility of unifying several livestock commodity groups?

TC: (laughs) Boy that would be nice. I don't know. These…that's a dilemma that I have because they have been…they're so independent.

CM: Do you see that in farmers a lot?

TC: mmm hmm. All farmers, they like to work independently, and they don't work…they're not very willing to work together. It'd be nice, and…we'll see. Somehow, sometime they're going to have to, I think.

CM: What do you think it would take to demonstrate to farmers that they'd have to work together?

TC: A miracle (laughter).

CM: So, in terms of, ah, institutions, that, that you'd be looking at these commodity groups to talk to, and speak to about purchasing local, what types of institutions do you think would be the easiest to target, or have you tried to target any…

TC: Um…I'm not sure who's gonna be the easiest. I think some of our educational institutions – Kenyon College, Nazarene College, some of that type would be a good starting place. Because again, you're hitting the younger generation, and if you can get into them sooner, it would be good. Um…some local restaurants…I think they're fairly receptive to purchasing stuff from local producers. Um…hospitals rest homes.

CM: So have you talked to anybody already?

TC: Um... I have, but again, it's just so preliminary that it's hard to…you know. You just can't even really even say that it's even a go, so I'll just keep it the way it is right now and see what happens (laughter) when some more develops.

CM: What do you think…we talked the strengths a little bit…what do you think are some of the risks that would be involved by developing some type of local market…possible flaws?

TC: Some risks? Um…being able…I think a risk would be just not pacing and having a plan. So it needs to be done in an orderly fashion, and with good groundwork and a good foundation. I'd also hate to see it get to a point…sometimes if it grows too fast or goes to well, again, that producer looses control…of setting that price. If they're not involved or if they grow to big and then they are offered something else, or again, this…you don't want to…you loose your grassroots if you're not careful.

CM: Can you explain how that could happen?

TC: Ah…A good example would be ocean spray. Everyone knows ocean spray. They were started as a cooperative – just a few small producers…and look what's happened – it's just exploded. Now I don't know if anything like that could or would happen, but it is

a risk maybe, that if it goes too well that they have to have…buy in or hire in management to handle everything, and then those producers immediately loose control. They're paying someone else to do something they originally started doing themselves.

CM: So you're saying that there is a possibility for a corporate…for a family…for a composite of family farms or local farms to suddenly become a corporation.

TC: Right, and then they would loose the local connections. They'd go nationwide. Now I don't foresee that happening in Knox County, but Ocean Spray, and there's another one…orange…Minute Maid? Is it Minute Maid? I think were all that way. So…I don't that will happen.

CM: And then in terms of other risks the farmers…or what farmers will need to do if this is to happen, besides decide not to….

TC: Yeah, I guess we kind of got off…some other risks. I hadn't thought too much about risks, so maybe…my previous examples may not be the best. Um…just again, being able to produce though the supply that they do…that there is to meet the demand that we do have, is a risk. There will also be some regulations. Regulatory, um, guidelines that they'll need to follow to make sure that they know those risks so that they aren't becoming a human health concern.

CM: What types of…

TC: Whether it be through pesticides or herbicides, um, make sure that they are following the, the, accepted and labeled practices for that so that they reduce the amount of, of risk as far as that.

CM: Do they need to be doing that now already…

TC: They are, but a lot of them are just doing a regular garden…just a small garden, and candle handle it pretty well by going out there and picking out the bugs, or using the…but if they go any bigger, then again, they're gonna have to use…use it wisely. If it's done wisely and safely, there is not a problem.

CM: Do you see any major changes that would have to take place in the farms as they exist now, if this were to happen?

TC: Um…they'll just have to use more land. They'll just…they're gonna use more of their acreage to produce this food. That's all.

CM: But the land exists….

TC: Yeah the land exists. Yeah.

CM: Do you see any potential risks to other institutions that would be helping to invest…you mentioned the schools and the hospitals…

TC: Any risks to them?

CM: Yeah…what risks do they face?

TC: Um…risk is the supply. How consistent is the supply. That would be another risk of them is…with the producers is to have a steady consistent supply available. Which would be a risk to the buyer as well, because we mentioned there's seasonality in the fruits and vegetables, and we may not be able to meet the dem…the supply produces enough year round. So a risk could be…and if there we had a draught or something…during the summer, our supply is going to going down, so we're not going to have them available. So if we have an established market, and we can't do it…do it…due to immediately due to environmental factors that would be a risk to. So there would just have to be…but it's all worked out with contracts and with sketches and keeping communication lines open – being able to call four or five months before, 'hey, we're still planning on producing this, you still willing to buy?' Yeah…just keeping those communication lines helps reduce a lot of risk.

CM: Now, in terms of…it seems like there definitely is a danger in terms of what type of supply farmers can give. Is there a way that farmers could stagger, or…stagger the production so, so different farms are giving things out at different times?

TC: Livestock, yes, but the crops it is a little more difficult, because it's hard to grow corn when there's snow on the ground. So you…or even tomatoes and blueberries, they, they just aren't…the way to do it is, to begin using some artificial means such as greenhouses where you control the light, you control the temperature, and the moisture, and the nutrients available. But when you start doing that, then you, again, start adding to the cost of production. Um, now you're kind of offset, because you're producing blueberries and tomatoes when no one else has them. So the supply is short, the demand is high, you can charge more, but you have to because your cost of production is going up.

CM: So you're saying that, that yes, you can have a greenhouse

TC: You can have a greenhouse.

CM: …for something small, but I mean, if you need to also increase land, and have more, then I think that's something that's impossible.

TC: mmm hmm. You're limited by how much land you own, and whatever resources you have.

CM: Do you see any prospect…this might be beyond what you know…but do you see any institutions that could afford to have an inconsistent supply of…

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CM: Ah…do you think you could tell me a little bit about…if…are there any institutions that could deal with having an inconsistent supply.

TC: I think the way I'm going to answer this is, that, most…we are also seeing an interest in our institutions in working more through locally. So I think there is a cooperative spirit or atmosphere…that they're saying if, if local people come and say, 'hey – we can supply you this, x month, this much, from this month to this month.' They're saying, 'ok, that's fine…we'll take that.' And then those off-seasons, they can plan it…again…if you communicate far enough in advance, they can say, 'right here we're going to have local,' and then they can set up those markets that they've had before, say from California, Texas, Oklahoma – wherever it was that they were getting it from. So can they really afford it? Mmm – maybe, maybe not, but if you're communicating, then at least can fill in those off times. And so that would probably be the best way to answer that.

CM: What do you think are…concerns that…if you're a restaurant owner, and you're approached and asked to invest a little bit, what are some of the concerns that you're going to have?

TC: Consistency and quality. How consistent can you be at producing this when I need it, and what kind of quality are you going to give me?

CM: And what do you think the answers of the farmers of Knox County will be?

TC: If they thought through it and have a good business plan, and they're good business, and they're good growers, they'll say, 'can do it. Can do. When do we start?'

CM: And do you think that there are certain types of foods that these…that could exist year round?

TC: Um…year round?

CM: To a restaurant…

TC: To restaurants? Um…it would depend on the type of production system. Your meat products could be. Locally grown meat could be produced about year round. Beef, swine, chicken, eggs – eggs and dairy, there's a good one. If your eggs and dairy…heh – I knew if I talked long enough I'd get there. Um…milk…your dairy products and your, your eggs can be produced year round…with basically no problems. And your restaurants are looking for a, those type of things. They're also looking for herbs. Herbs are a big one…they like some…oh shoot, what is it? Oregano, or is it basil. Basil is one of the top selling herbs right now for restaurant businesses.

CM: Could we produce that in Knox County?

TC: You sure can. It wouldn't be hard to do. And they can be grown in either a greenhouse setting, or out in the field.

CM: Now why would a restaurant, a local supermarket, etc., why would the want to…

TC: Buy local?

CM: buy locally

TC: I think that would be…because again, you're getting it fresh. It's coming in fresher, so generally speaking it has a higher nutritional value, and, and you're cutting out all these…these middlemen. The shipping, the handling costs, and it's just being eliminated. It's coming straight from the field to the restaurant, and it just tastes better…and they like it.

CM: And you think that…you mentioned the public response.

TC: mmm hmm.

CM: Ah…you feel will be high…tell me about, maybe a little bit about the demographic change that's occurring and that new market in the ah…the upper class urban sprawl that's starting to hit us. How do you think they would respond to something like this?

TC: They're looking for it. I think that's kind of what's driving this shift…and…at least in the this area. They're asking for it, and they're not finding it. So, as people start doing it, if we're meeting that demand, there's a demand there and we're just starting to hear it and being able to meet that demand. Where they're moving out from Columbus and Cleveland and these areas, they're looking for it in their local markets and so on, and we just have to find a way of meeting those demands.

CM: Do you think that…would you agree in saying that the new people coming into this county are mostly of a higher class than the people that are in the county?

TC: I don't want to say higher class…but, um, it does appear that their jobs are in Columbus, so they're working in Columbus, but they're living here. They're commuting to work. And so…what their pay scale is, I…I couldn't really tell you. And which class they fit into, I don't know. I...I…

CM: I'm sorry…I should be sticking to the agricultural questions. What do you see as Knox County as a community, um, what could this local food market do for them? Outside of the economic benefits, what could it do…?

TC: Well I think we…we kind of live in a society today where we don't even know who our next door neighbors are. And people who have been raised in cities have no idea what goes into making their food. And I think…I can see several benefits. You're going to be…know your neighbors a little better. You're gonna appreciate what goes into

making your food. You're gonna appreciate those efforts, and I'm not advocating organic and or conventional, but for those who …you're gonna have a deeper appreciation when you see what goes into your food, you can now kind of understand why. Maybe some chemicals and fertilizers have to be used…if they're used wisely. And that they aren't the bad evil thing that most people perceive. That some chemicals, when used right, are perfectly safe. So you have an appreciation for who's grown it, how it's grown, where it's grown…you know your neighbor better, so you're having a more unified community, which just makes for better living.

CM: Could you tell me a little bit more about the organic versus non-organic standards and how that fits into the…

TC: Now there isn't, there is an increasing amount of interest in having organic food. And what organic food is, is they try and use, and…practices that eliminates um, chemical based fertilizers and, and treatments, and herbicides, and fungicides, and they try to use some natural whether they're oil based, or they're, they're all organically based, eliminating all this other stuff – pesticides and that kind of operations.

CM: And the standards to be certified organic…

TC: They're, they're very high – I think it takes three years to transition your fields and livestock in. Livestock, if you, if your transitioning into organic, if you have livestock, the mature animals can never be certified organic. Um, it all comes from their offspring, and you have to feed them certain foods, and…that are organically grown. You have to reduce the amount of, ah, …ah…oh...what?

CM: Pesticides?

TC: Yes…pesticides that you use on your ground. And it's quite…the standards are high. And there's a whole book that's just an inch or two thick that has all these guidelines and regulations.

CM: And do you think that I'd be accurate in saying that those guidelines make for a better product, or can you make a safe product without following those guidelines?

TC: I think, I think you can. I think you can produce a quality product – a very safe, a very high quality product, with chemicals. Now, I'm not advocating that you go out and just dump all the fertilizer that you…you…you just think through it logically and you, you minimize it. You only use it timely application…of chemicals is, I think, the key. I think you can do it organically, but it…you don't have…you don't have the quality as far – well, the size and that, your yield is lower in organic, but there's no chemicals, and the apples are kind of shriveled, and they can be sploshed – they aren't the big robust, smooth, gigantic apples that you see. They're…but they're still good. Um, so you…just – wise judgement. Timely application.

CM: And do you think that the…having a local food network and having people, I mean you talked about being closer…closer to the food and closer to the source of the food. Do you think that would help dismay rumors about what good food actually is?

TC: Oh I hope so!

CM: …being found in a label.

TC: Yeah…I hope so…Yeah, because they would be able to ask those questions. They can go and see where this food is grown. They can actually…they may be driving by their neighbors yard every day and seeing him plowing it, him coming up and watering it, taking care – 'oh that's how he's growing it.' So yeah.

CM: And would you envision something where, where people could not just know that their food was grown locally, but know in a sense, know exactly where – which farmer…

TC: Yeah…and what went into it. Yeah – they know who that farmer is. They establish a relationship with him. So when they see each other at the movie theater, they say, 'Hey Bill, hey Joe, how are ya?' And he lives out on a 120 acre farm and this guy lives in downtown Mt. Vernon, and, or works in Columbus. But they know each other and they can say, 'Hey, how's your kids doing…great, great, glad to hear it.'

CM: So you definitely see a tie between social relationships and food…

TC: Yes…yes…oh yeah. How many parties do you go to where there's not food offered? Food is the center of all of our social activities (laughter). So food is very integrated into our social structure – I don't know if you can separate it.

CM: Is there anything – I mean you've covered more than I could ask with everything that I've asked you. Is there anything else that you'd like to tell me about the nature of the local community in regards to food distribution?

TC: Not that I can think of off the top of my head. I'm about worn out, I think.

CM: Then we're going to close there.