

Interviews

Family Farm Project

10-23-1995

Interview with Richard Mavis

Eren Zink

Richard Mavis

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Recommended Citation

Zink, Eren and Mavis, Richard, "Interview with Richard Mavis" (1995). *Interviews*. 16.
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Eren Zink

Interview with Richard Mavis at his home on the afternoon of October 23, 1995.

Eren Zink: It is October 23rd and I'm interviewing Richard Mavis for the family farm project. Okay. So, you already know a little bit about our project I guess.

Richard Mavis: Well, I remember reading the article in the newspaper. It was a picture of somebody riding on a tractor and that sort of thing.

EZ: Yeah, okay. Well, right now we are just trying to get the views of the people in the community about family farms and I guess our goal is to understand the family farm a little better because there has been a lot of talk about how the family farm is slowly disappearing. So, I want to ask you a few questions to see what you as a...

RM: If you have the questions prepared we can go from there.

EZ: All right. Well, How long have you lived in Knox County?

RM: I'm a lifelong resident except I went , graduated from Otterbein college down the road. I spent one year in California. But after being born here in Mount Vernon and raised in eastern Knox County in Danville and then teaching two years. After we were married, my wife and I are both from Danville, uhh, we taught two years in Wooster city and then moved back to Mount Vernon. Outside of about three years I've been here almost all of my fifty-three years. My mother, I often say in my political speeches that I'm the product of the railroad's son who married the farmer's daughter. My mother was a daughter of a Jefferson township farmer. My Dad was a full fledged farmer that did all the things. The dairy cattle and hogs and sheep and chickens. And I can remember when we farmed horses. And my dad grew up... his dad was a railroad worker here in Mount Vernon and later became a policeman when he lost his job because of the depression. The two of them got together and I grew up in Danville where we had a farm outside of town that my dad purchased and that's how I spent my summers. So I've been here all my life.

EZ: And then you worked in sporting goods for a long time?

RM: Yes, my father bought in 1953, which was when I was eleven, a sporting goods store in Danville which was partly grocery and partly sporting goods. Since dad was an avid hunter and fisher we gradually in Danville converted it into an all sporting goods store. By 1960 it was all sporting goods. In 1968, when I arrived back in town teaching school and doing some coaching we opened up a store here [Mt. Vernon] and had... I mixed teaching and being in the sporting goods store and then later I left teaching and got into politics. I still do that. We closed that store in January of 1994. So uh, we were in business in Danville and Mt. Vernon. Dad sold his store in Danville about four years ago. We were in business about forty years.

EZ: Were you the store in downtown Mt. Vernon?

RM: Mavis Sporting Goods, yeah, that was us.

EZ: Okay, yeah, now that rings a bell.

RM: That was us.

EZ: Oh wow. And then... And so you've been... How did you start off into politics?

RM: I was teaching school, coaching, working at the store and my dad had served two terms, 1964-72. There was a lot... The two years that between 1972 and 1974 was when I ran. There was a lot of controversy in the media and pretty well got after the present commissioners. They'd done some things that maybe weren't illegal but were questionable ethically. So I was interested because dad had been commissioner even though I had been away part of that time. Interested in public service, umm, so I ran for commissioner and in 1974 was elected and was very fortunate to be reelected five times. So I served twenty years in the commissioners office and was defeated last fall. And I've been a Democrat in a relatively... Knox County's conservative. We're agricultural. Agriculture is still our largest activity here. And, uh, I've been fortunate to be elected and reelected. But I think it was a... I don't know that I... that people were dissatisfied with me. I've been controversial in that we did a lot of things. The Kokosing gap trail was something that I worked for and pushed on. 911 was another one. Solid waste district closure of existing landfill. A lot of those things. The outer belt. Resurrection of an old I157 project which was to connect with the outer belt in Fredricktown and go to Newark. I wanted to resurrect that but, over the years you make enemies and I think the climate for democrats in 1994, I think that trickle down from the federal all the way down to local level, people voted republican. So it wasn't... I didn't get beat in a landslide but I was defeated and so I left office and I really don't have any regrets. I've had an opportunity to kind of relook at what I wanted to do and what I want to do. So I have a nice campaign going for mayor. If I'm successful there I'll be mayor and if I'm not I'll do something else.

EZ: Is Mt. Vernon a more, like... um..., a better place for a Democrat than the county as a whole?

RM: That's a good question. Registration wise Mt. Vernon has just, um, just a little over 1000 registered Democrats. They have 2800 registered independents and about 1500, um... these are households by the way, about 1500 Republican households and then there are about 250 mixed households where you have both parties represented in the household. So, registration wise its more heavily independent, but I think historically if you ask independents what they are then they tend to be more Republican than they are Democrat. My views have always been kinda middle of the road. I cringe at the word liberal. Uh, I think most people in Knox county do. I grew up here and we believe in working a day for a day's pay, we believe in helping people but, but not making a bad practice of it and umm. So that's, umm, I don't know that Mt. Vernon is... I've always won here. I ran for State Representative ten years ago and won Knox County but got defeated in the other two. I ran for mayor four years ago. I lost in the absentee ballot by 74 votes and lost the election by 70. So I actually won election day but got beat because the

absentees were against me. I think in Knox County were not unlike others. A lot of the older folks that vote absentee are traditionally Republican and umm... So I'm hopeful to make a good run at this and umm as I've said the city has usually been good to me. Umm, I've only lost I think even last year when I lost the Commissioners race I actually won the city but I got beat in the townships. So it's been good not that its heavily Democratic because its not . I've been fortunate to get a good vote count.

EZ: Good luck with this.

RM: Thank you.

EZ: I guess, do you come into contact with farmers a lot in your campaign trail?

RM: Well umm, when I was commissioner for twenty years. The county commissions are kind of recognized as the next step above township trustees. I mean the people in the city elect us as well as the folks in the unincorporated areas but I would say that of the time spent in the office regarding activities, much of our time was spent dealing with the activities that might be geared towards the agricultural areas. Such as following the farming industry and knowing that the machinery has gotten bigger and wider and heavier. Well, bridges along county roads, and no matter what road its on, the county commissioners and the county engineer have the jurisdiction over bridges. Whether its on township road or county road. So, it was a problem keeping roads in such condition that it, and with bridges that were wide enough. A lot of the bridges we replaced were low profile so this larger equipment could get across them. They had to be updated as far as weight was concerned because most farmers have big trucks that transport their grain. And umm, so we did have a lot... there was also a lot to do with the soil conservation service which has to do with water conservation, soil conservation. The county had to end up, ahh, because we wanted to do it, it was the thing to do, but we supported a lot of those financially. The commissioners are not a legislative body their an appropriating body which basically says we're in charge of the funds, make decisions on where they're spent. So we did the 4-H program and the county, umm... the extension service was greatly funded by the county commissioners. So I would say a large part of the commissioners job was related to different aspects of agriculture in the community. So yes we did have dealings with a lot of agricultural people.

EZ: Have you over the twenty years that you were in the commissionership, did you have to deal with a lot of changes in the structure of farming because that seems like a fairly critical time as far as growing farms?

RM: Well from a commissioners perspective we not only worked closely with the agricultural end but we also got involved with economic development. There was always... In Knox County you always wrestle between what you would call and economic and industrial development versus the integrity of a history of agricultural activity in our community. I think and I've done in politics over twenty years you make several speeches and you do a lot of research and you work with a lot of people and one of the things that is clear here in this county as well as it is in surrounding is that the number of farms was decreasing and the size of the farms was increasing. It was not unusual to have people that... For instance my grandfather whom I talked about earlier, he farmed 300 acres. Milked about 30 head of cattle and did all those things. They did their own

butchering had their own eggs and they made a nice living and when he passed away he had some money in the bank which my mother and her brother and sister inherited. I don't think that's possible. Most of the farmers nowadays are either specializing in all grain and they need at least a thousand to three thousand acres to do that and I know a lot of farmers here and they're hooked up to computer networks. So their getting the daily pricing. They have large storage areas where they can harvest their own crops keep them until the market changes. Some of them sell them on futures. The technology has changed and philosophies have changed greatly. Knox county is a little unique because Mt. Vernon is kind of centrally located and we're, I've often said, we're where the hill country meets the flatland. Western part of the county is very flat. Green valley... the acres in green valley are among the best in the state of Ohio. Whereas when you get over in the eastern part the shale hills, terminal moraines are farmable and the farmers do a good job with them. But, their production levels certainly aren't what they are in the western part. I remember every year here in Knox County service runs a contest for productivity by the acre. And they have a soybean contest and a corn contest. And I remember as a kid in Danville the farmers used to talk about 100 bushel of corn to the acre... That was the ultimate. But, I'm sitting through these meetings where they announce the winners. A lot of people are getting... It's commonplace for 150 bushel. The fertilizers, the method, the no-till farming, and that's been a big change in this county. The twenty years that I was commissioner we went from a few people no-tilling to a large section of our agricultural participants doing the no-till rather than the old fashioned plowing every year. So I've seen a lot of change, you know, whether it be the types of crops. Soybeans certainly, the amount of soybeans grown has greatly increased but umm, the type of farming people do, the marketing they do, the transportation involved, the selling, the storing, all of this sort of thing. And from a governmental standpoint of making sure that roads are such that people can get their machinery and their crops in and out of their fields. There isn't any question that there were many changes which took place in those twenty years.

EZ: It sounds like it. I remember my grandpa had a farm and I remember going out and like doing, whenever it was harvest time being out the fields picking corn and getting itchy and that sort of thing.

RM: Well, you know we used... My grandfather used to pay us a dollar an hour to bale hay. Well, you know, very few people bale hay anymore. It's all in the big rolls and it's all done with machinery and it's all done with machinery. Still there's a few balers, but they usually have a kicker on them and they kick it into the wagon and then have automatic unloaders. So, those things have changed. Just the types of machinery that are now on the market are much different. It used to be an old pull-type 12A John Deere combine might cost you \$3000. These multiharvesters they have now are \$125,000. So that's um, it's changed a great deal.

EZ: It's no small change there, buying one of those. That's for sure. How about umm, the uhh, like the growing development sort of push from Columbus up this way. Is there a different between what the farming community and what the Mt. Vernon community, what they see as the good in development?

RM: Well, yeah, that's maybe a good way to approach it. I think you saw that just recently when transportation committee came out with a proposal, and that's what it was, it was a proposal for an outerbelt, and I don't know how closely you watched this. But, about four years

ago I was part of a committee that wanted to seriously look at transportation in and around Mt. Vernon. There were several surveys done and after meetings and surveys, really the end result was people in Mt. Vernon and Knox county had two priorities. The first was to get in and around Mt. Vernon more easily and second a quicker way to Columbus. Their survey was did Mt. Vernon people want to go to Newark? Well, some did but not the majority. Did they want to go to Mansfield? Some did but it wasn't the majority. So the really, there were two priorities. Let's look at an outerbelt first and then lets look at a better way to I-71 and to Columbus. And what came out of this committee then that started and I was part of because it was my idea to initiate it and then I lost the election so I stepped out of that. But the committee that did continue to work came up with this proposal. And there really was some fault in the presentation because they came out kinda... I describe it as throwing it on the table and saying... People said take a look at it were going to ask you to vote on it yeah or nay in sixty days. Well they went to the townships and the villages and people were shocked because they had a proposal with two thousand foot right-away around... which took in much of our prime agricultural ground. It also took in some of our perimeter subdivisions where people had gone in and built new houses. So immediately the farming sector of the community banded together. And they had petitions saying "no you can't do this, our ground is traditional, it's been in our family for years and we want to keep this for our sons and daughters." And I believe in that. I honor that request. But on the other hand I think that we have to understand that the price of ground when used for something other than agricultural goes from, in Knox County, \$1500, eastern part of the county is worth seven or eight hundred dollars a ground, but if you get up here around Mt. Vernon in the western part it gets to be \$1500 and \$1800 and at one time \$2000 per acre. But for development that ground can be worth \$10,000 an acre. And then I think a lot of people who would argue that this land is ours, its our family's, it's going to always be our family's, when \$10,000 looms as a possibility I think then those rules change. And I think Knox county is impacted by that, certainly Centerburg. As you pointed out that the Centerburg or... or the.... Columbus intrusion into Knox county is going to be a great impact on us. We have, I think the population of the census will show us that the two leading growth areas would be Howard township, which is Apple Valley, and Hillier township which is Centerburg area. We're getting some growth in others, but, I was just checking, the city of Mt. Vernon has only grown 140 people in the last 3 years. The city hasn't grown a lot. I think they're going to begin to because they've begun to annex some areas. But the other factor aside from driving up land prices and traditional agriculture ground now being converted to subdivision ground. I think the other thing its doing to is that 50 mile distance between here and Centerburg, or here and Columbus, used to be considered kind of a barrier. And when the Delco water company recently bought eighty acres of ground in Fredricktown area and said we're going to put in a water production field and we're going to ship your water off to Marion and Morrow and Delaware counties, it should have sounded an alarm to the people of Knox county that as the outer belt of Columbus gets more thirsty, a fifty mile pipeline to this aquifer which we've coveted for years if you look at the comprehensive plan that was done for the county in 1975, it clearly states there that the aquifer that uh lays below Mt. Vernon and goes all the way to Fredricktown is like a huge underground lake. They make the statement in their that it looks as though that there's sufficient water to handle Knox county's residential, industrial, commercial growth for the foreseeable future. Unfortunately, No one thought that they would be coming in from out of the county and taking water at the rate of two to four million gallons a day. And I think if you get Columbus up here looking at groundwater prospects... And Ohio water is terrible. Ohio water law says clearly if

you own ground you can take a reasonable amount of water. Unfortunately it didn't say what reasonable is.

EZ: Of course.

RM: So I think as we look at the impact of Columbus, not only is it doing funny things with our values of property. It's breaking up traditional farms. The people, as I said, they come in and offer this grandiose amount of money. The other thing it creates is water and sewage problems because most of them want to sell lots off that they can have on lot septic and on lot water systems. And those septic systems aren't always agreeable with the soil. And we haven't been real aggressive in putting in a county sewage treatment system. Although we do have Apple Valley and we do have some perimeters around our villages and city. But, um, yes. We are being impacted and some people would argue that's very positive and some people would argue it got negative. Depending on whether you got part of that roads money or not.

EZ: Yeah, whether you have some land that...

RM: Right. If you've got land to sell, you're probably happy about it. If you don't and you're more impacted by the problems that comes with that. You have the health department struggles and stresses. The health department stresses township trustees. Most people that move from the city into the rural areas. They're not used to dust, many of our roads are still gravel, in the summer time. They're not used to agricultural smells. So if they are over at the Centerburg airport, most people don't realize there's a nice little subdivision at that airport, but immediately to the north of that there's a pig barn. One of those commercial pig establishments. It's been there for years. And unless you're there in the summertime and unless you're there a lot, to live there you don't really notice that. If you're just driving by it looks like a nice area. So, snow removal is something else. People have to drive to Columbus and they're forty-five minutes away and the first you know it's six thirty in the morning and their road is not plowed yet. Well, the county has over four hundred miles of road, The townships have anywhere from twenty to forty miles of road and they can't get those all plowed by six thirty in the morning. So, snow removal, dust, odors, ahh, water, sewer, all those present governmental problems along with the land division and all that sort of thing. So yes, we are impacted.

EZ: I guess so. Okay. So, we are trying to get an idea also of sort of like, the city view of what farming is like. I guess since you're not that farm off the farm.

RM: Ahh... Yeah, growing up in a small town and having a farm, a grandfather, I spent a lot of time even before my father bought a farm. I spent a lot of time at my grandfather's place and learned a little bit about farming and then when I was in high school we had our own farm. So it was a matter of driving five or six miles out of Danville everyday and tending the livestock we had, or harvesting crops, or doing that sort of thing. And I'm not sure. I always thought that the relationships that existed between the agricultural sector and the community and the city was very good here. They do have, and I didn't know this when I was a kid, They have a farm-city day. Some of our service clubs have farm-city luncheons. The 4-H programs, I think, were historically were always geared towards farm kids. But that hasn't been the case for several years. I think there are many town kids which get involved in 4-H programs. And that, as the

county commissioner, when we funded that, I always prided myself in the amount of 4-H projects we had in this county. That we always had upwards of 2000 projects at the county fair. And those range anywhere from horse and cow projects to sewing projects to meal preparation. All of those things helped kids become a little more aware of what life was all about. So I think there were in a county of, well, 50,000 now, I think over the years family's have, you know, farm families have their children mixed together. Mt. Vernon school district covers a large agricultural area. We have Fredricktown and E. Knox and Danville. So the people who go to the city to school, many of those come from farm backgrounds in all the towns. So I think in school they mix, as they grow up get married and have their own children, like others we have people who leave, but we have a lot who stay here so, I guess my opinion is there has never really been any hostility. When school issues come up and its a matter of getting together to help gather the voting support, I see both farm people, professional people, retired people, a lot of those people will all work together to do that. So I don't think there is a big division between that. I think there's a lot of cooperation. I think that there's a lot of respect for what each group is involved in in the community. It takes that whole community to make it work. I don't see a division, I see a lot of coming together in this area.

EZ: Is there an economic, or well... How important is farming to Mt. Vernon as an economic basis?

RM: Well, um... Yeah. We used to get and they still... Area development foundation puts together an annual report. And I think when you talk about even Cooper Industries, which has been our largest industrial employer for a number of years, but if you look at the smaller ones: the Ariel, the Kelsey Hays, and the Hoover Universal, American National Cans. They're all very good and provide jobs for our community. But none of those would in all of the output that they have, I think they still are second to the agricultural output of our community. And we have a lot of people involved in agribusiness in one form or another. Whether it be from the governmental standpoint or the independent retailer who's selling them supplies or the grain elevator that's helping them store and market their product. I just think there's a in this community I think we recognize agricultural as a big part of our community. That's not to say that there aren't folks out there who don't know that there are farms out there that have a harvest to get in. But I think the awareness here is a high level. I think there would be very few people who don't have some knowledge of what's going on in the... For instance this time of year when harvesting is taking place. You just kind of grow up with it so you know when it's happening and you know people are in the fields. You know these things are going on around you so... Yeah I think it's pretty well noted that agriculture is still the major part of our production in this community.

EZ: How does the local government feel about big agribusiness coming in? Like, I saw in the paper the other day there was talk of a couple chicken farms down the road, I think the county over.

RM: Yeah, there's a Croton Egg Farms been just one county over for several years and there is talk of putting one in just up the road now. And I was involved in a discussion a year and a half ago since I was chairman of the four county solid waste district. We were always looking for ways to get rid of solid waste. And these people have a technology that they're bringing over from one of the European countries, maybe Scandinavian area. But basically what they were

going to do was take all the newspaper that we could produce in this four county area, actually they needed more than we could produce. But all the scrap papers that we produce and other papers and they were going to mix it into this big slurry. And then they had this vacuum type that would pull the slurry up and put it on a mold, heat it, and it would make these egg cartons....

[End of side one]

EZ: We're up and running.

RM: And I think those kind of things are good. I think that's the type of activity we want to look at. That would have been a mechanism to get rid of paper rather than putting it in our landfills and the other things we have to do with it. But, on the other hand, that particular business I think would have been fairly well received. But the chicken farms themselves because of odor, in some respects because they're foreign owned. We're still... We still are kind of, I use the term redneckish in that we're still American, born and bred here and we kind of like to think that our land is all owned by Americans. We know that's not true nationally, but. I think there is a opposition to that kind of situation. Foreign ownership, smelly factory type farming, there is an objection to that and I don't think that objection is merely coming from the agricultural sector. I think it's coming from the urban sector. I think you'll find that in agreement among all elements of our community. I think over the years that I was commissioner we were looked at by a large meat processing firm. They were going to bring 300 jobs in here, but there was going to be a big slaughterhouse. That kind of thing, again, is frowned upon so the big factory type agribusinesses, because of odors, because of foreign ownership, depending on the situation, I think draws a lot of negative comments from the community and even hostilities develop. We tried to, being active in economic development in the community, we tried to about three years ago there was an effort to bring in a... well there was, I'm sorry, a proposal to bring in an alternative fuel plant. They were going to bring all the solid waste from a large area and make ethanol. That again, primarily because it was bringing solid waste in from other areas, people were very much opposed to that. So I think that there are some things that are perceived, you know a grain elevator, no problem. Machine sales, ahh, farm machinery sales. We have a producer stockyard that's been here. There are some people that object every Wednesday to the odor and the traffic but, its been here for years and it's well respected and well received. So I think that... We have two good TSE stores and a Farm and Fleet. All those kind of things which cater to the agriculture industry are well received, but I think that there is probably a limit to that. I think you would get some resistance if you would try to come in here with a big slaughterhouse, a big chicken farm, egg farm as they are. I think you do have, and I think it would be universal. I mean I think you would get the city folks as well as the ag. folks pretty much in agreement on that.

EZ: It sounds like there is a pretty strong... If the community doesn't want it, then they have enough... It's not too difficult to stop it?

RM: It a, I think that's a good point. The years I spent on area development, serving on that in my capacity as county commissioner. I think that you could say that the ear that was given to the community in those areas was pretty keen. I think there would have been a lot of resentment and certainly a lot of hostilities if leadership would have pursued that with the attitude. Because it wasn't like a few people being against something. It was pretty much a community concern. I'd

have to say that leadership pretty well acknowledges that and would have tried to comply.

EZ: How, umm, how are the organizations in the area involved in politics? Like is there a strong grange, or is that more social these days?

RM: The grange I think is more social these days and certainly the number of granges has declined, some of them have joined together. And I think that they have the same concern that other organizations about whether they are replenishing their memberships. Young people don't seem to be drawn toward that as they used to. You know with so many things to do, with activities, school activities, educational activities, people have... you have the movies and tv sets and radios and their own cars. They don't need that as a social outlet any more. Even though their parents and grandparents might have done it I don't think the young people are. So I think that granges as good as they were and some still are they're still hanging on, they still maintain their buildings, I think that is still on a decline, at least in a nongrowth. I think the farm bureau in this community still has a presence that's a pretty great presence. If they have a meeting that's.... they try to get into government and invite government officials to meetings, they generally don't get a good turn out unless it's something very controversial. If it's controversial you can bet that farm bureau will get out a lot of folks. I've always respected farm bureau, they're a good organization. They get out and hustle memberships. They do try if they're... such as the delco water situation that existed here. They were involved in pulling together some community meetings on that. They try to ahh, bring in... if there's just concerns, for instance we get into roadside spraying. Sometimes that's an issue. Road mowing of weeds, noxious weeds along roadways and other areas. Ditching, bridge building, all of those are farm bureau projects where they try to bring people together to let government know what their concerns are. Farm bureaus and granges still have a presence. Grange, I think, is waning somewhat. The NFO, really in the twenty years I was commissioner, I think their National Farmers Organization doesn't have a real presence. I think there's some membership here but I don't think there's a real presence here. And, umm, as I said there's some small 4-H in the county. The Extension service which has it's identity at the edge of town here. It has its agents. They do a good job. The Ohio State University is very supportive and generally the counties are very supportive and we have good agents. So from that perspective I think the extension service is big in most counties.

EZ: Okay, I think we'll change tracks a little bit. Is there... Well what do you think, are there differences between sort of the values of... family value on the farm as opposed to family values in town. Or is it still small town enough that there's not that big a difference?

RM: I would say that you know in Knox County where you're talking about the county seat being 15,000 and the rest of the county being a total of 50,000. And your Fredricktowns thrown in there and Danville and Centerburg. It seems to me that in the larger urban areas there would be a bigger difference in values. In a town this size, in a community this size, I think those values are pretty similar. I think parents still, granted you have some on both sides, you have some parents who are not as concerned as they should be both in the farming end and the city end. Again that's hard to measure because we have so many people living on small farms now that they might fit into the category of farmer, but they're not farmers. They may have a horse, a tractor, and they work in the, his wife works somewhere else in. So those people kinda distort numbers. You might take the traditional family of... where they're still working the farm,

making their living from the farm. Their values again, I don't see a great deal between here and the city and the outlying areas. But again there may be some distortion then because a lot of those folks living in those areas might be city folks living on the edge of town and having a farm. I think when you get to the large urban areas you see more of that. I would have to say for the most part that folks here in this community, the whole community, have pretty much same values. I don't see that being... And I think even if you compare Mt. Vernon folks with Danville folks, there might be some areas you would have to temper a little bit, but for the most part, they're the same.

EZ: Do you see in the next twenty years or whatever, Mt. Vernon being more the same or do you...

RM: I'd like to see us have moderate growth. I think there are some projections somewhere that someone has done saying by the year 2000 there will be 60,000 people or something, but. Assuming we have that, I'd like to see us have the city itself control its destiny in the area of growth. We have some subdivisions that have annexed but, we have a lot of areas that have grown up over the years as still in a township. Most people coming and going still think they're in the city though they might have left the city a mile or two ago. I'd like to see us gain a community identity and even to the point of annexing some of those areas. I know you can't force annexation, but I think the city needs to determine what it can provide services to and say "this is what we're going to, ahh, plan toward." These areas out here are deemed agriculture and most of the townships now, we have 22 townships and I think all but four of them are zoned now. And they have their agricultural zoning, and most of them are. There's a few commercials here and there but, for the most part zoning protects them. They try to zone out junk yards, they try to zone out some of the things... the agribusiness has a lot of flexibility. A lot of the people sell seed out of their barns. But I think for the most part township zoning is respected. The city has it's zoning. I think that everyone, and I'd like to see, and I think for the most part people would like to see moderate growth, controlled growth, still maintaining the city's integrity at the same time letting agriculture continue to flourish. And you know, you can drive 10 minutes and be in the heart of farm ground areas. Its not something that you can't get to very easily. That's what I'd like to see. Now if its not controlled you begin to have a lot of ground that is subdivided. It kind of grows up without proper transportation to it, roadways, what have you. Drainage, that's one of the things we've not done a good job with. This city, not only the recent construction out here on the Coshocton, but the city as a whole was really built without any surface drainage planning. A lot of the folks have water where they've not had it before. Flooded basements, they have eroded yards and ditches. And it's a problem. Yeah, I'd like to see some growth. I'd like to see it somewhat controlled and in a moderate manner.

EZ: Okay, I guess that's getting close to the end. I wanted one other one. Given that you are elected mayor in two weeks and all that, would you given the chance, live on a farm again?

RM: My wife... you know we've talked about it. I always thought, you know, being a kid and kind of an outdoors type person. As a kid I would like to hunt, but I haven't done it for years. My father is not able to anymore. I always thought that I'd like to have some ground just to be out and maybe I'd like to have... I like animals so, yeah, I'd like to have a horse. I had a horse as a kid and it seems like you'd still like to have one maybe. You could go out and if you wanted to

shoot you're shotgun or shoot your rifle, if you wanted to make some hay or do that sort of thing you could. But, my wife is not receptive to that. She likes not having to be afraid of the d[ark?].... you know, country folks have a different feeling about fear than city folks do. We're all kind of living here close together. It's one of the issues that the opposition used in our construction of the Kokosing Gap Trail. Because, even though the railroad used that right-away for years and years and years, the train seldom stopped. Well, we were talking about doing was removing the track and blacktopping a roadway for people to either run or jog or walk or ride their bicycles or use their rollerblades. And we were talking about putting those people in that farm territory. And a lot of farmers objected to that. Now they objected from the standpoint that- "gee, we think that ground ought to be ours. The railroad quit using so it ought to be ours." But if you push the argument it was more than that. It was, "you know, we think they're going to litter, we think they're going to climb over fences and let our cattle out, we think they might climb over our fences and get gored by our bull and then they'll sue us. We think they might urinate and do all those other things on our property. They might even build a fire and cause a problem." Those are the things we heard. I don't think in this area, now again, in some areas that might have been a problem. I did a lot of those since I was a big pusher of this, I did a lot of investigation into areas of the country east to west that had bike trails and whether or not those were problems. Occasionally you have a streaker, occasionally you have somebody who wants to break the law. But for the most part it wasn't. But land owners have a... they like their privacy. Farmers like their privacy. They don't like city intruders. And when I say intruders I mean if I go out and knock on their door and visit them that's not a problem but, they don't like people hunting without permission. They don't like people camping without permission. They don't like people coming on their property without permission. But, ahh, so I think there's a, as I said, what we like in the city as far as living is different than the country folks have. It's darker out there in the dark of night. It's darker in the country than it is here, and the sounds are different, but I think once if you're raised that way and you're used to that and you like it, that's what you always like. My wife's comment the other day, and as I said she works in the classrooms. She was commenting that the one of the classes she had, two or three kids that had recently moved from in town to the perimeter of town and they said they never wanted to move back to the city because they liked being able to see the brighter stars at night. They like not having all the lights, the city lights around and all the traffic and that sort of thing. Now whether they'll change as they get older I don't know. But I thought that was an interesting perspective. But anyway, I don't... I guess the real answer is, no I think I'm probably going to be a city dweller [for the rest of] my life. Even though that part of my life, living in a small town and spending a great deal of my younger years on a farm, I guess I'm geared towards city living now.

EZ: Is there anything you'd like to see a project like ours do in the...

RM: Well, what was your ultimate goal of this project? What did the group want to accomplish with this?

EZ: Well, it's a three year class, but each year there are new people doing it. So, our professor got a grant from, which foundation? The national foundation to do his project. Right now I think maybe we're thinking about trying to build a project on like the changes that are going on in the family farm. And sort of the encroachment of bigger business, you know, and people getting out farming because it's hard to do.

RM: You know, just a couple of attitudes that I can share with you over the years that I was commissioner and having been in a lot of meetings. I detected that farmers who were engaged in farming business objected to people coming out and having a small farm and raising some crops and working in the city. They do this as a part time job. I think that the real farmer as I'll call them objected to that and I think for several reasons. Number one, is that they didn't think they did a good job of farming for one thing. I think there was that feeling. The second thing was they thought they messed up, if I can use that term, you know. I'm sure you'll talk to somebody that talks about farm subsidies. There are those, especially the big farmers who feel that if the government would step out of the subsidy business and let supply and demand take over, that the big farmers would make it and small farmers wouldn't. And the regular farmers who are doing it versus the part-timers who are working in town and subsidizing their farming operation with their factory wages, a lot of people object to that because they feel that it screws up the supply and demand. I remember sitting on a planning session for soil conservation a few years ago and this was... I guess if you were writing a book you'd want to use this situation because we divided into small groups. I think there were like six small groups and I happened to go to this one. I was commissioner so I wasn't a farmer but I sat in on a group. And the situation was that the federal government was no longer going to pay subsidies unless each farmer that received a subsidy had his farm plan done. The farm plan was something that you had to do your projections and your acreage and all those things had to be built into a plan. And then you had to submit it and then you had to approve it. Had to get it approved by you, I think it was local ASCS office. And you had to do that before you get your subsidy. So here we were... In order to hire a couple of extra people to get these farm plans approved so that everybody could get that subsidy for that year. The question was, what are we going to do? And sitting around that table there were four young people, and I would guess that they were between 25 and 35. There were two older folks who I would guess between 50 and 60. And without question the young guys were grain farmers, they depended on government subsidy to make their payments on their land and make their payments on their equipment. The two older farmers were both dairy farmers and raised crops on the side, you know they did their corn and their hay and their beans. But they milked and they probably had their ground paid for. They'd been on the farm for years and years. They didn't care. Their attitude was, "we don't care about the subsidy, you know we sell our milk." Now they're probably getting a... You know milk is subsidized. But I think the attitude, and it was remarkable for me as kind of an outsider to sit there around the table and you see the four younger guys who you knew were grain farmers. Who had bought ground and maybe paid too much for it. But they wanted to go to work and plow and harvest and do that sort of thing. The guy over here who gets up at 4:30 every morning and milks his cows twice a day, and does the farming in between. And isn't worried about his debt service on his ground. He didn't care about government subsidy. These guys over here had to have government subsidy. And their attitude was, whatever it takes, hire those guys so we can get our farm plans approved. That was their attitude. Whereas the two old guys said we don't care whether you hire them or not. You know, it was really a picture in conflict... Of the conflict that exists between the younger farmer who's a grain farmer and what he wants to do is farm 3000 acres and have himself two big tractors and a big harvester. And the older farmer, the traditional one, who probably still butchers, still gathers eggs, still makes his hay and fills his silo and milks his cows. But that was kind of interesting. I still think about that and what even in this small community and that probably goes on nationwide. That attitude between the traditional farmer and the new

farmer. But anyway, it's been good I hope the project works for you. As I've said, over the years I'm keenly aware that farms are getting bigger and fewer, if you ask us what's happened to us. And I think a lot of farms close to the urban areas are being divided and subdivided. And family farms are getting fewer and fewer. I don't think kids want to, even the Amish... As county commissioner we sit on the board of tax revisions so I guess, a final story. One year this Amish guy, Amish man came in, he was an older man and he appealed his taxes. Most people that are going to appeal they get a lawyer to come in, but no, this guy didn't. He had purchased some ground up at Fredricktown and he had built two new houses, one new barn, renovated a barn and renovated a house. So we had put all that on the taxes and it was a sizeable addition to his farm. And he lived in one new house. He had two sons and their families lived in the other new house, and then one daughter lived in the renovated house. But they were all within a, you know, kind of an eighth of a mile of each other. So we met him and he had all of his bill of sales for all his building materials that he had used. And of course there was no electrical and no plumbing because they don't have it. But there's uhm... When we asked him what he charged himself for labor. He said, "well there's no labor cost because all my friends and family built those houses. There's no labor involved." So he wanted us just to put those on the tax duplicate for the price of the supplies and the materials. He didn't want us to include. We did depreciate out plumbing and electrical because if you and I went out and bought the house we'd have to put plumbing and electrical in it, but. So that afternoon we went up there and it was spring of the year, and he was, they were farming with horses obviously. And he was right in the barnyard there and he was harnessing up a team. But in the field there were already a couple of sons out there with two teams of sons working it. And the tax appraiser that usually went with us on such, he got. We were having some discussion, and he made a statement. The old Amish fellow made a statement when we were talking to him about his family because he says there's one son, he's working the ground. There's so and so, he's planting the wheat and that sort of thing. Or, I guess this was oats they were sowing. It was in the spring so they were doing the oats. He said "I lost one son." And so we... "What do you mean you lost one?" He says, "Well, he went to town. He went to town" he says, "we lost him." And that was kind of a funny thing because usually the Amish want to keep their kids on the farm, and as you said this one had built a new house for two of his sons and their wives. But this he'd lost, and that was the way he described it. He'd lost his son because he didn't want to be a farmer and he went to, as a matter of fact, he went to Mansfield. It was a bigger town. And I think there are probably some non-Amish who would like their son's to stay on the farm, but they don't. And they lose them. And I think that's why you don't have a lot of the family farm continuation, because sons and daughters want to get a job and make bigger money and they don't want to work as hard. Farming's hard work.

EZ: Yeah, it's something we've learned if anything.

RM: Yeah! Yeah, my grandfather used to get up at 4:30 and be in the barn at 5 and he'd milk until 7. My grandmother always had a big heavily FAT breakfast with eggs and bacon and all that sort of thing. And had thresher lunches and big evening meals. But he milked twice a day and didn't come in from the barn until 7:30, 8:00 every night. So, as I said, I don't people like to work that hard any more. And I'm probably just as guilty as the rest of them too. I don't think I'd like it. I've found that I like having a little freedom.

EZ: And having weekends.

RM: Yeah. Having the store and being in politics and coaching all those years, I always, you know. Monday through Saturday was always my workweek and Sundays were usually a my day off. Always worked in the store. Or coached, or track meets and that's the way it was. And as I've gotten older, I've appreciated that time. And I think farmers... Or my grandfather took one vacation in his life to Yellowstone National Park. One vacation and he lived til he was 85. Farmed til he was about 75. And I don't think people want to do that anymore.

EZ: No, they want to get out and about.

RM: Yeah, they do.

EZ: Alright, well....

[end of interview]