

Kenyon College

Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange

Interviews

Family Farm Project

3-20-1996

Interview with Don and Janet Hawk

Casey Lewis

Catherine Sias

Don Hawk

Janet Hawk

Follow this and additional works at: https://digital.kenyon.edu/ffp_interviews

Recommended Citation

Lewis, Casey; Sias, Catherine; Hawk, Don; and Hawk, Janet, "Interview with Don and Janet Hawk" (1996). *Interviews*. 25.
https://digital.kenyon.edu/ffp_interviews/25

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Family Farm Project at Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Interviews by an authorized administrator of Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact noltj@kenyon.edu.

Casey Lewis and Catherine Sias interviewing Don and Janet Hawk- March 20, 1996

CL: Today is March 20th, 1996. Kathryn Lewis and Catherine Sias interviewing the Hawks at their home. The first question I wanted to ask you both was this year, I don't know if you knew what our project consisted of but we're doing a web site on the internet and there are 6 different sections and my section, I'm doing 2 sections... One is what is family farming and the other one is life on a family farm. The first part that I'm working on is types of farms and I'm trying to get an idea of all the different types of farms in Knox County. So, what I basically wanted to ask first off was how your farm operates on a day to day basis as well as on a seasonal basis in 20 words or less. I'm just kidding!

DH: On a day to day basis, the turkeys are a 365 day operation- there are always turkeys on the farm. And that includes doing chores, the necessary chores each and every morning and each and every evening.

CL: And what do those chores involve?

DH: Well, if we are starting baby turkeys, which is birds received here at the farm same day hatched, that would include about three hours of work in the starting house of a morning, feeding, filling the starting equipment feeders each day and washing the waters. The washing of the waters is an everyday process, 7 days a week from the time the turkeys first arrive on the farm until they leave the farm. It's everyday no matter what the age of the bird are. And then it's just a matter of making sure there's plenty of feed. After the birds reach a certain age why we get to an automated equipment but the automated equipment simply fills the containers the birds eat out of- it doesn't put the feed in the bins and it doesn't guarantee that bearing doesn't go out of the feed line or something like that and you have to do repair work. So, that's an everyday checking. Health, temperature, air flow all these things are important to... you've got to have the best quality air possible so that you can get the optimum out of the birds as far as the turkey operation goes. The other aspects of the farm... we're just approaching calving season for the beef cows which will be coming up here within the next week or so we'll probably have our first calves. That's pretty much a continuous type thing. I mean we don't have a lot of cattle, I only have 40 brute cows but we hope for 40 live calves and it's kind of like our responsibility to make sure that when the calves are born and we do what is necessary to ensure that they can get up and get started. Sometimes that is just standing back and watching and other times it might be an assisted birth. It might be bringing in. Today it happens to be snowing and cold and nasty out so that might mean that when that calf is born you can pick it up in your arms and have momma follow you and you take it to

the barn and get a little protection for it so it can get going. Otherwise, we just keep them in clean pasture and just make sure everybody gets going alright. As far as cattle go and then the feeding cattle, why that's an everyday chore of putting the proper ration into the calves' sileage mix of grain. That's done about every morning. Just kind of checking the health and making sure everything's right and all the necessary things are done. And then, this time of the year, we're preparing for crop planting. As far as field crops go, corn, soybeans and then Janet has her everyday process of taking care of the tomatoe plants in the hydroponic greenhouse which is just now, she has 3 or 4 clusters of tomatoes on right now. You want to take that a little further.

CL: Can I stick with the cows and turkeys first and then we'll go on to the tomatoes so that I don't get entirely too confused. You said that the quality of the air was important for the turkeys- how do you ensure that the quality remains up to par?

DH: Okay. Today, for instance, it's cold and windy so we add supplemental heat to the barn which is not the most efficient thing to do because we got to let it back out. But we have to bring air in and if you try to keep the air flow going as should be so that the birds don't develop respiratory challenges the tempurature in the barn would go down to a stressful level for 'em. We need... turkeys that we got right now, we've got 2 ages- one group is 2 weeks old and the other group is 11 weeks old. The 2 week old birds don't want temperature below 85 in the house right now. And the bigger turkeys would want temperature of about 60. And so even with the bigger turkeys you drop the temperature so that it's natural air flow and it's 30 outside it's going to go to 30 in the barn to get enough air to go through. So, instead of that we add supplemental heat and then vent that out, bring fresh air in and vent the air out of the barn, exchanging air in the barn. So, the air should not be offensive is a term I use. Now that offensive can mean a lot of different things but for a person who works with that animal you have somewhat of a norm. For you walking in to the big turkeys you might consider the air to be a touch offensive because you haven't had any amonia odor exposure. But we determine what that is by, when you have a little bit of exposure. We look at it from the standpoint of if we can't enjoy working in that barn we shouldn't be expecting those birds to in there 24 hours a day. And so that's where it's at. We feel it's very necessary to keep a high quality air.

CL: And then you mentioned before washing the water? What does that refer to?

DH: Yes, yes. Okay. The vessels in the starting house are about 18 inches in diameter and they're automatic- they refill themselves. The water's controlled

by the volume of weight that's in that fountain. Okay. 85 degree climate is conducive to a lot of bacteria growth because they'll be feed particals on the beak of the turkey. They spill that into the water so it causes bacteria growth in that water fountain. So, we use an iodine solution and spray this onto the vessel itself and then take a sponge and swab the iodine around and clean- it's kind of a gritty-type sponge we use- and clean the slime, for instance, out of the drinking vessel and then dump that into a bucket and the fountain refills. Now, it refills... the water that they're getting, both houses get, is chlorinated which does help to reduce bacteria- holds it down for a certain period of time. The big turkeys, in finishing barns, those waters we move 'em everyday so as to change location. That keeps media dry underneath 'em and then they get the same treatment. They're sprayed with iodine and scrubbed with a brush. They're a bigger unit- about 24 inches in diameter and hold a considerable bit more money and they're scrubbed with a bowl brush and then dumped into bucket. That's an everyday occurence.

CL: And that's for disease control?

DH: Disease control. I always kind of tell the children it's like do you want to drink out of the same glass all day, from day to day, or would you like to have a clean glass. And that's kind of the way I look at it for the turkeys. In other words, it's necessary to have that water fountain cleaned no less then once a day. When the turkeys are real small we clean 'em twice a day but that's just for a short period of time. As we reduce the heat, this challenge does subside. The big turkey barns, you could get away with not doing everyday but we still feel it's best, again coming back to that theory I'd just assume drink out of a clean glass and I feel they deserve the same kind of treatment.

Catherine Sias: Does that make it so you don't have to feed them quite as many antibiotics? Do you feed them antibiotics in their food?

DH: Well, we do a couple of theraputic treatments. Mainly just... you can't always wait or don't always want to just let 'em get sick. But, sometimes they'll be challenges just like a weather change right now. It will cause a stress challenge. So, the tempurature hasn't changed a lot in the building but the birds senses when their's big climatic changes coming. And so we watch it and we kind of have a schedule we go... when the birds are small, to aid their body and the resistance of hatch exposure we use a small amount of medication in the feed. Then we do feed a perventative medication for cocsitiousus (?) which is an absolute must- if you don't, you can loose a hundred percent of your birds because cocsitiousus is a protozoa and it's something birds have to build-up resistance to. By the time they're 10 weeks old they have enough strength and enough ability to resist out and they shed it

and it doesn't give them a problem. And then the only other thing we do is, like a say, have a couple times during the grow-out period where we will come in with a medication and a feed for a short period of time and it's, like I say, mainly if there's an exposure within the flock this can check it. The birds have... it provides a means for the birds to fight off, I mean it knocks back a challenge. The birds are able to resist continued challenges and we can keep right on going then. And, like I say, it's not a continuous thing but it's a couple times for a short period of time that we'll expose them. And then we monitor on a day to day basis we're monitoring in case we have a flare up of anything comes up why we normally get pathology work done and then try to find out what it is and what it's sensitive to and then treat directly for the problem if we have something occur.

CL: What's the breeding process involved?

DH: Okay, the turkey business itself, now that's a field all of it's own. We are not involved in the breeder production. Most generally, the breeder production is done on farms and that's all they do- they don't have commercial turkeys. We buy the poults hatched and most of the hatcheries have their own breeder operations in other words. And then if they don't have enough eggs they buy and sell eggs- they're traded like a commodity too. But it's a highly specialized, extremely highly specialized, business cause it's from... on a breeder turkey, for instance, the hen from day one she'll be 28 weeks old before the first egg is collected and they went through an extensive immunization program, a lot of vaccinations and so forth, to try to ward them off. What the breeder/producer's goal is is to collect eggs for 26 weeks after they count production which makes that bird 54 weeks old. Their goal is to get a hundred eggs per hen is pretty much the goal. But tremendous amount of cost goes into that, that production field. I only know- I may speaking a little out of turn- I would say there's not more than 3 breeder family farm operations in the state of Ohio today. Most of them are company owned type operations. But I know of 2 for sure and there may be the third one that are still family. Kind of like we are only we're just strictly meat producers where they're strictly egg producers.

CS: Do you buy your turkeys from the family groups or do you gather from the company that you sell your turkeys to? Or something completely different?

DH: Most generally it's completely different. Processors have pretty much stepped out of the out of the hatchery business now as far as processing in goes. And the family held operators are tight with, in other words they market their eggs to a hatchery association in other words. The local one in the Danville area here is Cutty Farms. And in Western Ohio there's a hatchery

group called Cooper Farms. And those are the 2 main hatcheries in the state of Ohio as far as commercial turkey production. At the present we're buying our Poults from Cutty Farms here in Danville. They have their own company held farms and then they also have some independent producers in other states. They're spread out over about 7 states with hatchery facilities. So, they spread 'em around quite a bit.

CL: So, you buy the already hatched...

DH: The same day they're hatched. Yes.

CL: And then how long do you have them for, do you raise them for?

DH: At the present time we're going just about 19 weeks- from the day we get 'em until they're ready to go to market is 19 weeks. So, we get a turkey poult that's just a wee bit bigger than an egg and then in 19 weeks our goal is for them to weigh approximately 35 pounds- 134 days or something like that.

CL: And then do you slaughter them here or do you...?

DH: No. The birds... We market our birds with, at the present time, with Bilmar Foods which is the Mr. Turkey label that you would see in a grocery store. And we own the turkeys, we buy the feed, we furnish all of the inputs but we have a marketing agreement with Bilmar that they guarantee to take the birds and this agreement has some dollars and cents involved in it and it's basically tied to the cost of production which is directly influenced by the grain market. Whatever corn, soybeans and inputs are why that kind of dictates what the feed cost is in other words. But we don't do any dressing here, any processing here, on the farm at this time- just a little bit for ourselves but that's no commercial at all.

CL: Does your operation change from season to season? Are there any real seasonal cycles or is it pretty much...?

DH: Anymore there isn't... Now the demand will change as far as the market demand. Of course, traditionally you have the 3 holidays, the biggest one being Thanksgiving, then Christmas and then Easter. At the beginning, when we first started, we were strictly seasonal producers- we didn't have turkeys inside, for instance. Everything was grown out. We started them in the same building we start in today but we moved 'em outside at 7-8 weeks of age and they were finished on range. And so by the Thanksgiving time you were done with your turkeys, you might as well say. And we'd start back up, be ready to go, by the first of May.

CL: So, you'd take the winter off then?

DH: We did then. Today you, we, don't, I'll put it that way.

CL: And that's because you're able to control the temperature?

DH: Control the temperature and you assure yourself... you're assured a good market if you're producing turkeys 12 months out of the year. You walk into grocery stores you intend.. the normal, average consumer plans on getting what he goes to the store for. So, the turkey ham and the white breast meat and so forth, cooked, uncooked, you know, all the different deli items and so on, that's 52 weeks out of the year that product has to be available. Today, it's just an on going process expected the processor. He needs so many turkeys everyday coming into the plant to meet the needs of demand that's going back out the backdoor. So, that's it's now for us and has been since about 1971 we went into a year round production and we've been year round ever since then.

CL: And what about the cattle? Is it a dairy operation or a...?

DH: No. This is a beef cow/calf and then we feed the calves, keep the calves back, feed them to finish weight, which we start out with a baby calf on... the mother cow has the calf, say a 75 pound calf, and about 16 to 18 months later we are, our goal is to have 11 to 12 hundred pound finished calf ready to go to market. And that's where you get your ground beef and your steaks and roast and these coming from that.

CL: Do you use artificial insemination?

DH: We haven't and that's mainly because of time on our part. It is something that we would like to do because we could introduce new blood lines and maybe even generate some seed stock out of our cows. We just run a grade, what's called a grade herd- we are registered, we don't have any registered animals. But it is an opportunity for us to get some new genetics in. Right now, at the present time, we buy bulls and as we need to change the genetic package. But it would be nice to be able to introduce some new genetics through AI but we just haven't taken the time that it does. It is a little bit time consuming and we haven't taken the time to manage that part of it yet.

CL: Um, okay. Well, I guess I'll move on to the tomatoes. Should we do it that way or do you want to ask about...?

CS: I'll ask about turkeys first.

CL: Okay.

CS: How exactly is your operation different from the rest of the turkey operations in Knox County, now that you're the only independent one left, and, you know, all of that stuff?

DH: Well, one of the primary differences is we have turkeys 12 months out of the year, and most of the other growers, in fact all of the others at the present time are seasonal growers and everything is still finished inside (on site, maybe?). The other main difference is the fact that the feed mill furnish..buys the turkeys from a hatchery, furnishes the turkey to the farm, furnishes the feed, and the inputs, I don't know the particulars of it, but the majority of the inputs are furnished by the feed mill. The family growing the birds provide the labor and the facilities and I believe probably the electricity and they are paid so much a pound for the finished pounds of turkey. In our particular case, we buy the birds, we buy the feed, we furnish all of the inputs and take all the risk, and then we either get all the plusses or take all the disappointments.

CS: How were you able to remain independent during the whole thing that happened when all of that stuff was happening?

DH: Well, I guess it's just a matter of... with all due respect to everybody else that's in the business, but our business is production agriculture. Everybody else that was in the turkey business was doing something else also. They weren't depending totally on the turkey operation for their livelihood. And, uh, there were some folks that did drop out, some was due to uh the age of the participants and the next generation maybe not desiring to go through the stress and turmoil of continuing on with the operation, so that caused attrition in some cases in other cases there were some folks that decided that they wanted to do something different than what they were doing, and they developed their real-estate in a different manner, or whatever. Uh, we've been committed with where we're located, we feel fortunate that we're settin' out here where we are, and uh, I I guess I'd have to say that I pride myself enough, I still want to be my own manager, and I feel fortunate we're able to work one on one with the processor; I can pick up the phone any time I want to, and ring him up and we can set and talk about what we're doin' where we're headed for and where we've been and so on in that way. And just keep workin' toward the future. And I guess you might call it a little bit of bull-headedness too but that's how come we're still out here by ourselves

CS: So was the problem that changed the turkey business that there was a

processing plant in Ohio that closed, and now the processing plant is in Michigan, and that created a higher production cost, is that...

DH: Well, it didn't create a higher production cost, they took some away from us. The processor took some away, it created a higher cost for them. In other words, they were getting the turkeys hauled from the Danville area or within this about 35 mile circle to Garrettsville OH, north of Akron, for about a cent and a half a pound and now it's two and 3/4 cents to Zeeland (sp?), Michigan. The plant in MI was always there, the one in OH was owned by the same company, the one in MI wasn't running at capacity, so their desire was, let's close the OH plant, lets bring everything to MI, run that to capacity, and we'll do it that way. So when the marketing agreements expired, then they readjusted, and in some instances that was an unacceptable concession by the grower, some of the growers, and forced some of them to say just, ya know, heck with it, we're done. But as time progresses on and as the need continues, and fortunately does increase, well some of that's starting to soften up just a little bit at the present time, where we'll..we aren't back to where we were at 3, 4 years ago, but I anticipate in another year or so we'll be getting closer to coming back to where we were 3 or 4 years ago which we'll get 3/4 to a cent a pound back they took away from us.

274

CS: Do you want to do tomatoes now?

CL: Okay, why I actually thought of a couple questions while you were talking. I was just wondering again about the seasonal cycles- are there any calving seasons?

DH: Well, that's what we're approaching right now. In other words, it will start, it should start, around the 20th of March which is today. And that will probably extend on for about 60 days. That's the breeding season is 60 days. So, I expect the calving season to string out over that period of time. As far as the cattle goes, that would be the seasonal there. Now, the other big seasonal challenge we have coming, that will be forthcoming, is planting the grain crops- corn, soybeans- which our goal here primarily is we'd like to be in the field by the first of May. If we have exceptionally good weather, if we can get in the field in late April, that's great. We plant a lot of our corn goes in the ground no-till, not 100% but the majority of it does. And so you have to allow a little bit more time for the soil to warm up. And but mother nature has full control over that. If we get there on time, fine, if we don't we adjust and then do what we have to to make the adjustments. But the corn, we would hope to

have in the ground by, well realistically by the 25th of May and we could go right straight to soy beans and maybe even, if weather'd happen to be right, we could be planting corn and planting soybeans same time. Because you use 2 different pieces of equipment to do the 2 different processes or can. And so, it's be nice to have corn and beans all in the ground by the first of June. That's kind of a realistic goal and yet some years it isn't- depends on how much rain you get.

CL: And do you guys get other people to help you out? I know you mentioned the boy that...?

DH: Yeah- we've got one young man that works for us and he's going into his third summer. And then the children are involved also as much as time will allow for them- they're still in school. But, as a rule, we... the one man, that we pick up, that's about the extent of it except on the special occasions of loading turkeys out and when we move from the starting house to the grow-out barn and so forth we have to acquire, get some a little bit of extra help, some extra high school boys- as a rule it's high school boys- and there's 2 or 3 men that work local places here that will come out and help lift turkeys and so forth, too. Why other than that we try to just pretty much keep that to a minimum.

CL: Um... and what about receiving new turkeys? Is that a seasonal cycle at all? Or are you getting them year round?

DH: We start 5 times a year every 10 weeks is really what that boils down to. But it's pretty much, just pretty much, a set pattern that we work from. We adjust it or the hatchery adjusts it for us if they have they happen to run short on eggs, it gets adjusted. But, none the less it's basically we start 5 times and start every 10 weeks.

CL: Well, should we move on to tomatoes then, I guess. Well, I guess I'll be asking basically the same questions about the tomatoes. Um, could you maybe just describe the daily process of keep up with the tomatoes and caring for the tomatoes and maybe the seasonal cycles if there are any?

JH: Okay. There would be a seasonal cycle. I started my seeds in January and I will keep those seeds that have grown into plants and I'll keep them until December. Right now I have tomatoes that are four and a half feet tall probably with green tomatoes setting on 'em. Hoping to have tomatoes to pick in about a month. Daily work is going in, checking the water, test the water to make sure the nutrients are where they're supposed to be for daily

feedings. And checking the leaves, um, working on pollinating which last week I just got my bee hive in so I don't have pollinate anymore. They're my helpers. But then I have to sucker the plants...

CL: And what does that (sucker) mean?

JH: Pulling the extra little leaf out between the main leaf and the stem and all those always have to always be removed. And they keep growing back and you keep going back in removing them. Ahhh, then I have to cluster prune which is I want to have like out of a cluster of say maybe 8 to 10 blooms I'll trime it down to like 4 and 5 so I have nice, premium size tomatoes to pick. And then every once a week probably I have to go through and clip which is clipping to a string that hangs down cause I want to keep the plants growing straight and that helps hold them up because there isn't any other means to hold them up. They just keep growing and they keep getting taller. Ahh... Yesterday I worked on putting J-hooks on my tomatoes, clusters, to hold the tomatoes up because they're gonna get really big and otherwise they could pulldown on the stems. Um, in probably about a week or so I'll have to start pulling leaves off the bottoms of the plants. Um.

CL: When does the picking begin?

JH: It should be in about a month cause I've got nice, green tomatoes on now. It will take a while, hoping that I have plenty of sun too to help bring 'em around. Lets see, what else was I thinking about that? Joe and Shannon help me when I do start picking- they're both sophomores. And they help build boxes, they help wipe the tomatoes and they help sticker the tomatoes, which each one will have a sticker on it. I do all the picking, I do all the work on the inside. Don helps make sure the water and fertilizers mixed up and everything's running properly.

DH: We work together when it comes to marketing or when it comes to deliveries.

JH: Yeah. On the deliveries we have 5 or 6 stores that we deliver tomatoes to. And probably by delivery time I would say our daughter Shannon will probably have her driver's license and she plans on delivering.

CL: Good, good. And when is delivering take place then?

JH: That will be 2 or 3 times a week so that will be in a month yet too that that will all start.

CS: Is the reason that I haven't seen any of your tomatoes recently that you just haven't...

JH: We haven't, don't have any...

CS: Okay, so once they start ripening them up then you'll have them for the rest of the year to sell?

JH: Yes, that's our goal anyway.

CL: Okay, so you start picking in a month and you pick all the way until...

JH: I'll keep picking 3 times a week once I start and I'll pick 3 times a week clear up through December....

DH: 35 weeks.

JH: No break in the year or anything. You just, just like milking cows, it's a daily thing. If you're not picking, you're in there suckering or clipping or cluster pruning or pulling leaves off the bottom of the plant. And that takes...

DH: Janets goal would be to, on the 850 plants she's caring for in the greenhouse, she's gonna pick for 35 weeks and the goal would be to get 35 pounds of tomatoes per plant. That's the ultimate goal- that or more.

JH: That would be a good season if I could produce that much per plant.

CL: Now, have you always done hydroponic, is that how you pronounce it?

JH: Hydroponics.

CL: Okay, hydroponics.

JH: This is our third year.

CL: Okay. And previous to that did you grow tomatoes outside?

JH: In a garden and not to sell. That was only for my own personal use. This here now is commercial, I guess you'd call it, cause I'm going into the grocery stores.

CL: So, obviously this has effected the seasonal cycle of the growing of tomatoes. Um, before was it basically the same as growing soybeans and corn. Was it plant in the spring and harves in the fall?

DH: Yes, it would.

JH: From when I used to do it in the garden, yes, you wouldn't plant garden... I'd always plant tomatoes the day after Mother's Day in May hoping to have tomatoes the end of July through August up through September. And then I'd use those for fresh use and to can tomato juice and spaghetti sauce and ketchup.

DH: I would have to say that the greenhouse is a result of the shakedown that took place in the turkey industry.

JH: That was the reason for putting in...

DH: That was the reason we put it in was because we were faced with a challenge. We didn't know for about a 6 month period of time that we were gonna have turkeys or not, weather the processor wanted us or not. Because their attitude was they wanted us but they didn't want us to make a living. And, so, I didn't need the exercise, we didn't need the exercise. We're in it to make a decent living- we don't get rich but we make a decent living. And that's our goal. And, so, we looked at this as a diversification. It was a choice of either we would raise tomatoes or do something else or Janet would go to town and work for somebody else. And it was a decision that I think we both... we spent nearly a year pondering and looking at and so forth and the decision was we'd, we jointly came to the decision that we'd raise tomatoes rather than her doing work for somebody else. I think, I know it's a kind of job that she does with the tomato plants, the husbandry work that she does with them, um, it, well, very she does a tremendous job- there's no question about it cause her production records have been very good.

CL: And what's the, briefly, what's the process of hydroponics? What does the term mean?

JH: Okay, it's soilless, environmentally controlled environment. Ahh, so that was basically...

DH: Soilless, environmentally controlled system. SES is a short term that they use for it. There's no dirt involved and the plants are feed through the water system through an irrigation system. Each plant has it's own irrigation tube. The necessary nutrients for that plant to sustain production, grow to plant growth and reproduce it's nutrients supply to it through the irrigation system. And, then, just like today is 30 degrees outside it's 75 degrees in the greenhouse and to a certain extent we can control the humidity- we can't

always control it. Likewise, in the summertime it gets 95 outside, there's a cooling wetwall on the greenhouse and through ventilation we can drop that temperature a minimum 10 degrees, down so we can keep it safe. We'd like to try to keep it below 84. Sometimes you can, sometimes you can't but you do the best you can. And that's, but that's where the controlled environment comes in. And, then, also we try to, as best possible, if we have challenges to the plants such as insects or whatever we try to use predator-type combatants for that. If there's an insect out there we determine what it is and if there's predators available to us then we will buy in and introduce predator insects in that greenhouse then to get rid of the unwanted instead of going in and using chemicals. Not that we're anti-chemical but it's just that when you got bees in there doing the pollinating work and so forth why the more natural keep it the better off you are.

CL: And is this a popular way of growing tomatoes? I mean, most of the tomatoes that you're seeing at the grocery store are they hydroponic tomatoes or is it...

JH: No, no! The tomatoes right now are coming in from Florida and they're field grown tomatoes. No, hydroponics is a special way of growing them. Um, they do have 'em shipped in sometimes and also from like out in Colorado- there's quite a few hydroponics out there. Hydroponics is growing, um, but there's not a lot of it.

DH: 20 years, the last 20 years probably been from infancy to what it is today. It's a more expensive product. If we had to sell tomatoes at the price that field grows are, tend sometimes to be sometimes marketed for, it would be absolutely absurd to even consider doing it. Because...

JH: The cost is so much higher.

CS: How did you decide to set it up so that the 4 months that you weren't selling tomatoes were from January through April. Like why don't you have the 4 months that you're not selling tomatoes be in summer when field grown tomatoes are more available?

DH: Well, primarily, 2 major factors- heat and sunlight.

CS: Oh, oh okay.

DH: That's the shortest days of the year and then the heat is a requirement. So, we get about 6 weeks, 4 to 6 weeks where we actually go in as soon as the plants come out in mid-December, we go in a wash that greenhouse down and

sanitize it and then winterize it and let it freeze. And freezing will also help us to combat challenges that occur during the summer months. And, so, that's another plus factor in it. There are some growers that do terminate their crop early and even will start a second so during the garden time they don't have any production and they'll have late fall production also. It's a matter of choice on that.

JH: But they still terminate by December.

DH: They still finish up around the 15th of December- they still terminate and start over again.

JH: And then that's the time to go ahead and start your new plants and everything. So, that's when I started mine- January the 8th this year. So, it just takes that long then. Waiting, waiting.

DH: You figure 90 days in good weather, when there's full sun, but it takes longer now when you got cloudy days where there isn't any sun at all. The plants don't really necessarily just totally set still but it sure slows down cause last week we had a full week of darn good sun and they made phenomenal growth last week. But if we get a week of cloudy, damp, cold weather why then they slow back down again. During full sun, 90 days from seeding to the first day, as a rule.

CL: So, even though they're still in this controlled environment there, it sounds like they're really still dependent on the natural environment.

DH: Sunlight.

DH and JH: The natural light.

JH: But it's more than 90 days from January to April 20th.

DH: It is here, yes. In the winter months, yes. But the first year that we started, we didn't get started early because it was a real bad winter and we were trying to build in the winter time. Janet planted her first seeds on March 21st and on June 20th she picked her first tomato. So, that was our first year. That we were already 2 months what we wanted to because when those tomatoes show up in a store people start asking for us. We had people calling today and we're very happy that they call us. We have people calling yesterday or the day before- a couple of restaurants calling to talk to us and they says, " You got any tomatoes yet- we're looking for tomatoes?" And, so, people, by mid-April, as soon as we can get them ready, they're anxious for them and will

be until the garden time which normally occurs late July/early August.

142

CS: So is the marketing of the tomatoes pretty much done through word of mouth and through just kind of locally going around and selling them too, just like you and you're kids going to grocery stores and selling them...

JH: We have a list of people and we call, and then we know, they'll order they think they need, and then we'll go ahead and deliver it.

DH: We work directly with the produce managers at the local stores, and that was a process of knocking on doors, introducing ourselves and our product, let them determine whether they wanted it or not, and then work from that, it was just another one of those feelings, we thought we wanted to do it that way. And the first year was a...a little scary, but, uh, we made it through it, and last year fortunately through the high quality of tomato that Janet produces, uh, we had a greater demand than we had production. And, so uh, in the future, maybe when the children get a little bit further along, if there's one of them that's more interested in being more involved, have more time to be more involved, uh, it's not something that wouldn't be beyond expanding, but at this point in time, we feel like we're pretty well maxed out. But that's mainly, it's kind of a routine, I pick up the phone and call the produce managers, they expect my call, and they'll order for the first half of the week, some will order for the entire week, it just depends, and then we set up our schedule and deliver the tomatoes to them, and in a lot of cases I'll contact back, say like on a Thursday, to take care of the weekends.

CS: How many grocery stores and restaurants do you sell tomatoes to? Is it mainly grocery stores and restaurants?

JH: Yes

DH:Uh, mainly grocery stores, as far as the number one quality tomato. Yes. Uh, we have uh..

CS: I know you have Big Bear...

JH: And Krogers

DH: Big Bear and Krogers, Metheiser (Sp?) Meats, Taylors in Fredericktown, Dale's Cardinal in Danville and Gribbles IGA in Loudenville. And, like I say, their demand was greater than what our production was last year, and uh,

which is good, we're glad that it is that way, and we try desperately to provide them a high quality tomato.

CL: Do you think, uh, that since the demand is so high that you might expand, have you thought about that at all, or is it still so new?

JH: No, it's that I don't have time to run another one, I would have to have hired help if I were to expand. If anybody else, you know, wanted to come in and help, get involved with it, then I would consider it. But at this time, can only do so much in one day's...

CL: I know..

DH: we'd have to expand our...if you...

JH: To expand I would have to have

DH: You'd have to have more markets, so you'd spend more time on the road delivering. Those aren't negatives, if you've got the time to do it, and that's like we say, we're approaching these decisions...we're building for the future but at the present time, you might say we're in a holding pattern. Uh, it's kind of the same way with the turkey operation, you might say. If the children are interested, they're just, it's, too young, and we've both promised ourselves that we're not going to build facilities expecting the children to be a part of. Once the children get done searching out where they want to be, where they've set their life to be, we've, they've had a lot of exposure here and we want them to look on the other side of the fence, the right way, and determine, well...I..maybe I'd rather be a farmer, maybe I don't want to be a farmer, either way's ok as far as that goes. If they want to be a farmer or be involved in production agriculture, because it's a way of life, it's not just an 8 to 5 job, it's a way of life, so if they want to be involved in that, that's great. Then we do have areas for which we can expand without an enormous amount of indebtedness, but at the present time if we expand any further the way we are we're going to be totally dependent on hiring extra help. Well, we would rather have the children participate, we wouldn't call them hired help, we'd all be working as a team, in other words. And that's, there is a difference. When you're working for your own goal, it's a lot different from when you're just working for somebody else.

CS: Is Delbert graduating this year?

DH: He's a senior at this time, yes

CS: So what is he doing next year, you wanted him to do something other than

farming, correct?

JH: He's undecided as to what he's going to do.

CL: Kinda like me.

CS: Yup.

209

CL: Would you be able to have tomatoes all year round if you... I know now you start selling in May and go all the way through the year but...

DH: You could if you wanted to. It would just be a matter of whether you want the expense of the heat...

JH: You'd need another greenhouse...

DH: You could program it, in other words, you could start at different times. You start a fall crop, take it through the winter, for instance, and finish it off the spring.

CL: Would you be able to do that, feasibly? I mean...

DH: Not economically.

CL: Would there be enough sunlight in order to produce..?

DH: That would be the biggest challenge. It would be a slower process.

JH: It would be a lot slower.

DH: Yeah, a lot slower production. You wouldn't get the pounds per plant but you'd still get good, quality tomatoes you just wouldn't the pounds per plant and your cost per pound would be a lot higher because heating factor.

CS: But you'd get a lot more money for them, wouldn't you, too since it'd be in the middle of the winter, or...

DH: Well, that's kind of a debateable situation, now this year for instance, the early crop of Florida tomatoes got frost damaged. Well, the guys didn't just set

on their hands a lot of em went out, tore em out and put new ones in. Uh, we don't know what 1996's tomato market is even going to be at this point in time because those rascals are going to start coming up about the same time our tomatoes start coming up. Um, we could be competing with some 20 cent tomatoes and that's no fun 'tall. But the quality won't be the same, and we..we're pretty strong on the fact that we produce a high quality tomato, and we feel that the market will justify the quality will justify the market in other words.

CS: If you didn't sell them just independently, by yourselves by going out and finding places, is there some kind of a market similar to like grain markets and stuff where you can just take the tomatoes and say, here, sell 'em...you know give em to them...

DH: There's a brokerage firm, that is associated with the company that supplies the input products, in other words the seeds and all the other inputs it takes to grow the hydroponic tomatoes, they have a produce company and you can set it up and take every pound of tomatoes to them, and they'll market them. You have to grade them up accordingly and they'll take em...what they're doing is they're taking them to the grocery store just like we are.

CS: Um hmm, and so is the reason that you don't give it to them that you can get more profit by doing it yourself?

**JH:It's another job for us to deliver, but we might as well do it instead of letting someone else be a middleman...just going direct. So it's better. And it's closer for us to go to the grocery store than it is for us to the warehouse
DH: 60 miles is the closest broker.And it's noway's near that going to Mt. Vernon.**

CL: Do you have any more questions?

CS: Um, yeah, I have one question, it's not really related to what we've been talking about, but um, I know that you're farm is incorporated, is that right? And I don't understand exactly what that means and how it's different from farms that are partnerships, or an independent farm, or I guess I don't mean independent, but like not incorporated, but, so what exactly does being incorporated mean?

DH: Well, incorporated means that Janet and I entered into an agreement with ourselves, you might say, and uh, the one of the plusses of the corporation is that it is a medium for which to transfer to the next generation. That was one of the factors that we looked at when we did this. Uh, to make it different than

say just Don and Janet farming, we work for the corporation, as it is right now. ..this gets a little technical... but what it amounts to is that the corporation is a tax entity of it's own, and then Don and Janet have their own checkbook, you might say, ok, so if I draw a wage from the corporation, it's an expence for the corporation, so they get it as a deduction. And then I take it...that's what we live on in other words, whether it be lease money or what3ever it is. We own the realestate part of the real estate, we rent it to the corporation. So it's a form of income for us, it's an expence for the corporation. As the sole proprietor, every dollar you take out to live on, it's income with no expense, as a rule. In other words, fer whatever it might be, health insurance or whatever, its, you have to have income to have it, it's taxable, but you don't get ex...a lot of items in personally if you don't get the expense. Now for the corporation, why, it's its own tax entity. A partnership can work similar to that, because the partnership itself, it can take, can uh, allot a salary to the partners. But the partnership is not a tax entity. It never pays taxes. Profit or loss from the partnership tax return is reverted to the partners. So if the partnership shows a profit, then that goes to the partners, and they have to, it all has to be computed out that way. A corporation is a tex entity of its own and has its own federal i.d. number and the whole nine yards that way, and pays taxes.

CS: Oh, o.k.. So when you get um, government subsidy payments, do those go to the corporation...

DH: Um hmm. The farm is operated as a corporation. The farm is operated as a corporation. Everything but the tomato operation. The tomato operation sets on ground that we own, and so we kept that as a sole proprietor, instead of putting it into the corporation, because, for instance, we might decide later on, the young man working for us, may be interested in being part of the corporation, he may releive some of the load from me, we may expand the tomato operation, and use it as part income, and not draw from the corporation, for that matter, the corporation still stays viable, and the tomato... that's the only difference that we did there. But yes, everything, everything else that's done is Skyline Turkey farm Inc. Everything but the tomatoes.

CS: I think that's all I have

CL: Yeah, that's all I have too... Can we look at the pictures?

(Turned the recorder back on to learn about the process of setting up the hydroponic tomato plants.)

CL: What is the process of the planting the tomato plants?

DH: When we start the tomato plants, when Janet starts her tomato plants, she starts with a seed and she uses a 1 and 1/2 inch square rock wool cube and these come in slabs of just about 100 to a slab and they're in a starting tray. Now, she'll irrigate that cube before she puts the seed in with just a PH corrected water, no nutrients, just water. And then she'll put a seed down in the center whole of each one of these and they set on a table in the basement here on the house and she'll normally plant just about 1200 seeds. And then at about 14 to 18 days they need to be moved to the greenhouse. Now, at 4 days after planting of that seed, it's up, the plant is up. Now, we use artificial light which nothing more, in our little farm set up here, florescent lights, a whole bank of 'em down there. But we just set this up temporary thing over this stainless steel table and provide additional light so the plant doesn't get too stemmy and let 'em grow and we'll get about that 14 days on them. We want to try and get them separated by the time the true leaves, not the first leaf out, but the first true leaf that comes out, before they get to tangling up too much in eachother- that's not very wise to do that. About 14-18 days we take that 1 and 1/2 inch cube and we go out to the greenhouse and we have saw horses, just regular carpenter saw horses, that we put together and fiberglass sheets laid out and we'll set out about 1000 3 inch cubes and soak these cubes in nutrients solutions. And then put the 1 and 1/2... Janet will go through her trays and she'll pick out the very best- at that time she is eliminating about 200 plants but she'll have about 1000 plants that she'll transplant into these 3 inch cubes. And then that will get us another 10 to 14 days, in those 3 inch cubes. She waters those once a day to start with, then about 3 days and then it's twice a day and sometimes maybe if the sun shine a bunch she'll do it 3 times a day because we're still having to manually water the plants when they're here. But then, after about 10 to 14 days in the 3 inch cubes she's ready to set it over onto the grow bags or on to the perlite (?) bags. Then from that they're irrigated through a computer that we program based on the size of the plant and the fruiting stage it's in and the time of year and so forth, how much water they need. Each plant has its own irrigation tube and feeds each plant. And that's basically the process.

CL: And what are these cubes made out of?

DH: Well, it's called rock wool. My understanding is it's a form of a stone that has been heated and exploded. Now, I can't say that I know all of the chemistry of it but it is an extremely absorbent. You can take a 5 gallon bucket of water, probably 30 of these, probably not more than 30 of these 3 inch cubes will absorb a 5 gallon bucket of water thereabouts cause we go through a lot of buckets of water when we're getting ready to transplant, transplant out. The perlite bags, they're 6 inches wide and 42 inches long, and

it's an absorbent material- I don't know truly what the chemistry of it is other than it's an inert product that's not supposed to mold. It takes about 12 gallons of water to soak that bag up, to fill it up with water when you're ready to transplant onto the perlite bag.

CL: So, do you put this (3 inch cube) on top of there (the perlite bag)?

DH: Yes. The perlite bag is a plastic bag with this white perlite material inside of it.

JH: It's this long and it will have 3 holes on top and I'll set cube right where that hole is and these roots, the water when I start, I'll have my tube up here to fill and as the roots keep growing they will come out the bottom and go down into that bag. So, after like 2 weeks I'll move my water tube then down to the top of the bag instead of up here at the top.

DH: She takes it off the top of the cube- that kind of helps to allow... it's okay if the cube goes ahead and dries out. That helps keep the stalk from getting too soft from the water around it. And lots of water goes there because the plants are absorbing the water up from the roots down in the bag anyway so she just puts a tube down on the bag and irrigate into the bag instead of into the cube.

CL: Who came up with this process, do you have any idea?

DH: I really don't know.