

## Bob Miller Interview 2

[Alyson Thompson] Today is May 15, 2018, and my name is Alyson Thompson, I'm the Director of Marshall Public Library, and I'm here today, with, uh, Bob Miller, and we're here talking today for the Smithsonian Museum on Main Street Crossroads for Rural Change, and Bob is gonna tell us a little bit about his family history, um, and, um, how agriculture has changed for them over the years. You know, I think about agriculture, and even, um, since I was a child to now, and then if you talk to my parents and my grandparents, you, they, they share these stories of living on a farm and how every family had a farm, they have a garden, they have, um, the livestock, they have their own field and equipment. It was very independent. [Miller: yes], at, at the time, and, uh, it, it really was very common for lots of people to have all of those dynamics, including the barns and the silos and things like that, but now when you go out into the country and you go down a gravel road, you don't see those, I mean, just the landscape, also, has really changed, and so we're just really curious about hearing your perspective and hearing how your family farm, from your grandparents to sort of present day has changed in both agriculture and with, with your livestock.

[Bob Miller] Okay. All right, uh, yes, um, my family started in the, uh, late 1800s. Uh, my great-grandfather come from, um, Germany, and come up the Wabash, and, uh, first settled in Vincennes, Indiana, and then, uh, moved on up to Clark County, and, uh, uh, his farm was, a, uh, about a mile, uh, from where our farmstead is right now, and it was, uh, like you said, very, uh, it was an agrarian society, uh, everybody, uh, farmed, uh, and everybody had a small farm. They had their gardens, they had their orchards, they had their livestock, and they raised their families that way. Uh, on my great-grandfather's farm, uh, they finally tore down the old cellar a few years ago, but it was a stone cellar, and I remember playing in that as, as a child. Um, and then, uh, that was my great-grandfather. Then, my grandfather, uh, moved to, uh, where our homestead is, or our farmstead is right now, and, uh, just kind of the same thing. There was always the garden, the barns, the sheds, uh, I always asked my, uh, dad, why my great-grandfather settled in this part of the country, and he said it was because it reminded him of Germany. You know, you had to have woods, you had to have, uh, for livestock, for shade, for water, uh, you wanted a little tillable ground, uh, I do not know why they did not go up and settle on the flat prairielands of Illinois, where I would love to farm today, but, this part of the country reminded them of the old country, and, uh, so they, uh, they settled here, and again back to their gardens, their fruit, a lot of orchards, fruit trees, back in the 18-, the late 1800s, and early 1900s, uh, all the canning and preserving that you did to, to, uh, provide, take care of your family. Uh, then my grandfather took over the farm, um, um, and because of the depression, he lost part of his farm, which, uh, kind of instilled in us how to be, uh, good stewards, because my dad was a very, very conservative, uh, person and farmer, and did not want to take chances, because he grew up as a child in the depression, and saw what that was like and how hard it was to, uh, uh, get through those times, but it seemed like people in agriculture, again, were still sustainable enough to, to handle that. Also, you go back into, uh, uh, my father's generation. Uh, there were eight kids in the family, so you had your own workforce. That was

just the norm, you, the more kids you had, the more livestock you could take care of, and things like, like that. Um, but my dad then got out of the service in, uh, 1955, uh, came home, uh, was married already, uh, I was born before dad got out of the service, uh, came home to take over part of the family farm, and had a small, uh, had a small milk cow herd, uh, milking shorthorns, which were not the most prolific milk-givers, but they, he started milking a few cows, uh, sold cream, my mom sold cream and eggs in town. Uh, I hear those stories all the time about, you kids don't know how tough it was, because it was just cream money and egg money--that's how we survived. But still, even in the '50s and early '60s, the, there were still, uh, the family farms, uh, there was still that generation coming, coming back to the, back to the farm, and then as we, as I grew up as a child, um, very labor-intensive, very, very labor-intensive. I mean, I have three other brothers, so my mom and dad had a workforce of four boys, and, uh, you did everything by hand, and the way you grew the farm was just by adding a few more acres, or adding a few more head of livestock, whether it was chickens, uh, hogs or, or cattle, but we were very, very work oriented. Uh, and, uh, I'll, I'll talk a little bit later on then about how the practices have changed, but as we've gone forward then, into my generation, um, agriculture changed in the fact that, um, more outside jobs were available, and, for instance, I had one brother that said, "I don't want to work this hard," and so he left the farm, when he got out of high school. Um, I have another brother I farm with, that he worked in the outside world for a little bit, and says, "I don't like that. I'm gonna come back to the farm." And then my younger brother, he always had the desire to farm, so there are three of us, in our, in our farm partnership right now, and with that being said, then labor, the labor force changed, and, uh, young people began to leave the farm for better things in towns and in, in cities. Um, so from that aspect then, once the labor pool had left, then farming began to change and become a lot more mechanized, a lot more industrialized, uh, uh, a lot more labor-saving conveniences were, were added into that, because the labor force was, was not there, and then it also come to the fact that, uh, we became so, especially in the last ten to 20 years, uh, we became, um, more of a, uh, profit-oriented center, where, uh, margins began to become squeezed more, and so you had to operate on more volumes, and, and, agriculture, like any business, is very capital-oriented, and so that kind of limits a lot of people where they, where they go, but I, as I grew up, we always had the garden, and the milk cow, and the chickens, and, and things like that, but as our farm changed with labor, and began to change with technology, and the new way of doing things came along, a lot of those aspects were gone. Um, it's, it's cool to have your own garden, but when you get focused on other aspects, you didn't have the, have the time to put in the garden, and as the generations have changed, farm wives were not so inclined to do gardens and that kind of stuff, they found jobs in town, and, and all of a sudden, the, uh, very homogenous thing of, uh, mom and dad sitting on the back porch making decisions about the business kind of went to the wayside, and it changed, uh, uh, uh, uh, just the whole perspective on, on farming. Um, living on a gravel road, and that, that, that feel-good feeling: if you want to do that, I still live on a gravel road. If you like the dust and the dirt and everything like that, I still live on a gravel road, but, uh, uh, no, the landscape has changed, the barns became outdated, the machinery got larger; you, you could not utilize the barns as they were put up years ago, and what they were meant for, and so you, um, have done away with those, with those things. Um, I might also add that as the landscape changed and the buildings came down, and, and kids left the farm, they went to town, got jobs, and those in turn now, have come back, because the labor force went, the livestock went out of the, the countryside, and now they've come back in to build homes out in the rural areas, and that throws a

whole new perspective on the agriculture scene, because now we're dealing with, with urban neighbors, and, uh, uh, just, uh, you know, as livestock expands into, uh, larger operations, and, and we have young people that have left the farm, come back and build their nice home, and then somebody decides to build a livestock operation a half-a-mile away, they get up in arms, which is, it's understandable, but we have to raise food somewhere, and I can get on that soapbox and go a whole, uh, a whole 'nother direction, but, as people move out in the countryside, and, uh, we have, we have neighbors now that plant fruit trees right along the edges of the field, and that's a whole 'nother animal you have to deal with, when you start tilling crops and using chemicals and things like that, with their fruit trees, and so we have to be very aware of our neighbor situation now, but a lot of the barns and the buildings came down to make way for new and improved ways of doing things. Um, um, I'm 64 years old and I do not want to use a scoop shovel and a pitch fork any more. I'm sorry, that's just the way it is [Thompson chuckles], and uh, and uh, my offspring, which I have three daughters, they all went to the big city, and so they're not there to do, to do the work, that, that labor work, and, uh, you can, you can increase your farm a whole lot better, more than just actually physically working any more, it's more of a business mindset, and I think that's probably one of the big changes is that agriculture went to a business mindset, rather than a lifestyle. Um, everybody's always envisioned that farming is a, it's a lifestyle, and it has, it has been up to now, a certain point, but now it has to be run as a business, uh, if you want it to grow and succeed. Now, if you want to have your small family farm, or your specific area, where you want to do something, those small, there's still a place for those small family farms, but, uh, we've become very industrialized, and so we've had to change those things. Um, so....

[Thompson] And tell us about some of those changes as far as how your farm has grown over the years.

[Miller: Okay. Um.] To, to stay in the business, and, and to stay competitive, and to continue to farm, because you see how so many of those smaller family farms died away. [Miller: yeah]. And, so how did that happen, you know, was it just the jobs, or?

[Miller] I think some of it was the jobs, pulling, pulling young people away from the farm, and young people--they began to see that there's other things in life than hard work, and, uh, when you are, back when I grew up, and, and in our operation today, dealing with row crops and livestock, that is, it's six days, it's seven days a week with livestock. Those animals need to be taken care of, seven days a week, and it's hard to plan a vacation time, because you don't know how mother nature's going to react in planting and harvesting crops, and so young people, they left us for something better, and so that changed that whole, that whole format on doing things. Um, when I grew up, I've, I've rented a couple of farms, from older farmers when I got started, they would have a 100-, 150-acre or a 200-acre farm, and they'd raise their families. Uh, today, uh, it just takes hundreds, if not thousands of acres, and instead of just hundreds of heads of animals, it takes thousands, because of the, the, uh, the margin on each one of those, and our lifestyles have changed. Uh, we, when I was a kid growing up, you know, you very seldom had the things that your, your city kids, your city friends had, you know, and so, uh, I think once we got a taste of that, that kind of changed that, and our lifestyles have, have changed, uh, but just

to go back into, uh, to, to our farm, uh, I grew up as a boy, uh, once my dad decided to get rid of the, the, milking cows, we went into raising swine, raising hogs, and we did it the old way, we converted old chicken houses, we converted old barns, we did, uh, we raised a lot of animals outside, uh, you know, in nature, and you dealt with nature, you dealt with rain, you dealt with heat, you dealt with cold, uh, and then all of a sudden, in the late '60s, the modernization of livestock came along, where we started building buildings and barns and putting animals in there, um, and becoming more efficient, uh, and when you become more efficient with your labor, you become more efficient in controlling the atmosphere, and so it just kind of continued to grow, so livestock, I've seen so many changes in livestock, go from a very labor-intense, uh, part of agriculture, to a more capital-intense, but with that, your, your animal husbandry habits and your training for employees has had to change to meet those demands, and, uh, but, uh, as we've got into, uh, confinement livestock, we can control that environment a lot better, we can produce a product a lot quicker and faster, and with that, we've, we've changed, and so I have gone through, in my lifetime, a very much hand-labor raising livestock to the early modernization of, of confinement systems until now, um, my brothers and I are exiting the livestock business, because our facilities, uh, have been up for 40 years, and they're, they are literally deteriorating and falling apart, but the next generation in our family, my niece and nephew, uh, they are going to come back in, and they are going to put up a huge barn, uh, that will hold about 4,000 animals, and it will be, uh, it will be a contract barn. Uh, trying to manage the risk of markets and inputs and everything else, they have decided to, to make their way in agriculture work, is they are going to sell their labor to somebody else, and it's, I think that's the option that, that is going to be most feasible for them, uh, right now. Uh, so that's how livestock has changed, and, and numbers and confinement. Uh, from the agronomy side, that really gets me excited, because I, uh, I try to stay on the cutting edge of, uh, the new technology, and I love it. Uh, from going to a 30 horse-powered tractor, and, and a two-bottom plow, and sitting outside in the sun in the dust and the dirt all day to actually getting a 100-horse-powered tractor with a radio on the fender, and and going from a two-bottomed plow to a five-bottomed plow to today, we have tractors on our farm that range from 500- to 600-horsepower, we pull 40-60-foot implements. Uh, the tractor, that I, that I do the planting the crops with is a 340-horsepower tractor with leather interior and air conditioning, and, uh, a \$3,000 light package, so late at night, when I'm out there working, it's like there's a little town moving through the, through the field, uh, we've also adapted all the GPS technology that, uh, not only steers the, the tractor, but it also runs my planter, uh, gives me my planting population, it, I can, I can increase it, I can slow it down, uh, just so many things. Matter of fact, uh, I use, I've gone to the point, I use an iPad that, uh, that the GPS signal goes to a cell phone tower, and the cell phone tower beams to my iPad, my iPad bluetooths it to my tractor, and that's how it steers itself through the field, so, uh, sometimes I feel like I need to throw a little dust and dirt on my face when I go home at night [Thompson chuckles] to make my wife think I've been doing something, but with the technology, uh, like that, um, we can work longer hours, we can farm more acres, because we're not actually physically having to drive the tractor. We can, we sit back, I can sit back, I cross my legs just like this, I watch the monitor, because I know it's going to the end of the field, it beeps, it tells me when I get to the end, I push a button, I raise up my implement, I turn around, I hit a button, it gets back on the same track, and I use that same track, year after year after year after year, but it allows me to, to, monitor what's going on with the planter. It also allows me to check e-mails, text messages, I can watch the markets, I can communicate with other people, I can multi-task a whole lot of

things, because I'm not physically having to drive, drive that tractor, and so we have all of that technology in, in all of our equipment, um, our tractors that we do tillage work with, that we till the ground with, they have the same thing, and so they can watch the implements better, we can work longer hours, we're not as fatigued, at, at the end of a long day, which allows us to do, to do more, and then we take that technology into our fertilization, um, um, we do what we call grid sampling, that way, uh, we're not just throwing fertilizer out there, we are putting it in certain areas, uh, then we take that technology in my harvesting equipment. I monitor my, my harvesting results on a foot by foot by foot basis, and so my crop, or my agronomist can layer those all together with soil tests, with my yield production. We can layer that all together, what, what I expect to raise next year, and then we build programs for fertility, uh, and so we variable rate our fertilizer, we variable rate our, our chemicals, uh, so the technology aspect, from just the GPS and everything like that has just changed it, it so much, I'm really excited about it, and then I know, uh, you also said you want to talk to me, I want to talk about the technology of the seed aspect, uh, we in agriculture have had some issues the last several years, and still do on occasion, about the genetically modified crops, and how do we handle those things. It still comes back into production, of, of food products, um, that we can get into a big discussion about whether it's right or it's wrong, but it has helped us to use genetically modified or engineered--seed corn is a hybrid: you take this plant, this plant--you get a, you take the pollen, and you take the silks, and you get a hybrid corn plant. With the technology of, of GMOs, and things like that, and adding traits, you just enhance those, and so, um, years ago, we used to use insecticide on our fields, uh, put it actually in the ground, and now we use traited hybrids that, that technology is, it's just a stepped-up protein, there's no chemicals going in the ground to, to control insects. Um, and we use those things to increase production, because increased production gives us the edge to compete in the marketplace, because the market's going to allow us, or give us a price, and if we can produce more bushels, um, on less acres, uh, work with the environment, those kinds of things, it just adds value to us and keeps us, keeps us in the forefront, and, and ahead of the competition. Um, and so those types of things have really, really helped, and we use more, more chemicals that are centered for particular weeds and particular crops, rather than just a broad spectrum of everything, and I've always, I love to visit with urban people as they go to their local hardware store and they buy all this stuff they put on their yards. I don't know if they're using GPS technology and managing it that way, or they just buy a bag, buy a spreader, they spread it on their yard, well, I've got a little extra left over, so I'll just put a little extra on it, you know, and then it rains, and it goes somewhere else, too, so, but that's, those are personal issues that, that I can talk about, but, uh, that's just how those things have changed. We've gone from, uh, uh, my grandfather picking corn by hand to machines that would pick one or two rows at a time. They always said years ago, if a good corn, a good corn husker could husk a 100 bushel of corn in a day by hand, he was doing really good. There's days last fall that I harvested 30- to 35,000 bushel of corn in a day, and so I've gone from two-row corn pickers that pull it down through the machine, and you've got the ears and you put it in the corn crib, to a machine that shells the product. It's just amaze, people are just amazed, when they come ride with me, and they go, "Wow!" It, it took this ear, it brought it through here, and I look back here, and the grain is already threshed, and it's cleaned, and, uh, the residue is going out the back end. Um, that's, it's just an amazing thing, how we, how we do that, and that has also changed the way we handle, we handle grain, and we have, uh, we have 300,000 bushel of grain storage on our farm, and it's, you know, it's, it's all controlled electronically. Um, it's just, it's just an amazing thing, and from that

aspect, and then, this is, that was the fun part of agriculture. The tough part of agriculture is deciding when to market that. Um, sometimes farmers become very personally involved with the crop that they raise and they, they don't look at it sometimes from a business side, but they always think, I've gotta get the most that I can, and sometimes that's not the best business, the business approach to it, but, but market, the, the labor aspect any more is, it's there. The hard, the, I, the difficult aspect of agriculture is the business side of it, making the right decision at the right time, and that gets hard to do, when we have so many worldly influences. We not only deal with mother nature, I was just, on the way in, I was talking to the, to my, to my grain broker, and he said, uh, these rains are really kinda slowing down, and they're talking some hot, dry weather coming in, in the next ten days, and it's like, so how does that affect my marketing? Mmm. You know. It rains one day and everybody in Chicago thinks the crop's made, the markets go down, then all of a sudden, you, what really helps is get a, a newscaster go, man, it's really dry out here in Iowa, and then the markets go crazy and it's a, we have a, and those are the tough things, on how to manage that aspect of it. Working? I can do that. The, the technology, I can handle that, but it's those day-to-day business decisions, as you look down the road, to say, I got, this is what I've gotta do to stay in business, so....

[Thompson] And you make a really good point, because I think that is the dynamic that has, um, caused either farms to succeed or not succeed [Miller: yeah], and there's been some, you know, some uncontrollable factors that unfortunately have been sort of the demise of some farms. [Miller: Oh, yes, I mean] And so, you know, especially, you know, uh, in their infancy is they're trying to grow, you know, you hear these stories of, well, they shouldn't have bought all that ground, or, uh, you know, maybe they shouldn't have bought all that equipment, but there's this fine line, how do I harvest, if I don't have the equipment, and how do I stay competitive, so talk a little bit about the dynamic of, of some of the success stories that you've seen and some of the failures, and, and some of the reasons, maybe, why [Miller: Okay], you know, and I think, again, there might be some luck that is involved in that, and, and maybe not. Maybe it is....

[Miller] There's, there's, all right, I'll go back, uh, as I said, my father grew up in the depression, and so he was very conservative in his thought process. As, as he grew the farm, and then as the next generation come on, and we all know how the next generation is--the next generation's always got wild ideas, they got different ideas, and they're gonna approach things from a whole 'nother perspective. I'm thankful that, as I started in agriculture, in the, in the early to mid-'70s, agriculture was really good, it was still, it was still, uh, work hard, more animals, more acres, and you do okay. Then, as we got into the late '70s, early '80s, interest rates come up, there was an embargo throwed on, the agriculture scene changed in a hurry, and all of a sudden, that aspect of just grow, grow, grow, grow began to stop, and my dad had pretty well kept his thumb on us boys and would not allow us to go and overextend ourselves, borrowing capital to expand, because back in the late '70s, if you didn't, if you didn't buy a piece of property or a piece of equipment this year, you knew it was going to be more next year.

[Thompson: mmhmm]. Well then, all of a sudden, farmers, especially farmers growing, farmers of the

next generation coming on, they probably borrowed too much, and all of a sudden, we also know what happened is, interest rates went up, and that's where--it's based on your cash flow, and when interest rates went up, there were a lot of, uh, a lot of young guys exited the, exited the agriculture business, because of high interest rates, they were just forced out, banks forced them out, so I was very fortunate of the fact that I had a father that was very conservative, and held us, held me and my brothers down to doing what we could only do, and we ran our operation for years, for years without borrowing any money. That also comes back to our personal lifestyles, uh, you tell your wife and your kids, no, we're buying a new combine, so we're not taking a vacation, we're not going to buy a new car, we're not going to do those things, because you are building your business, and that's what agriculture has really always been about: building your own business, and, uh, going that direction. Then, uh, we went through the, that late '70s into the '80s and we kinda, we flushed out a lot of the agriculture, those guys in agriculture, who were not financially sound. Did they borrow too much? Did they buy too much? At that point in time when they did it: no, but as circumstances change, as interest rates goes up, as the embargo came on, as the world changed, that changed agriculture, and so it puts you in a bind, and sometimes it's, you just have to face the fact, in any business, in any business that we can't keep going this direction. Then, uh, uh, there is some luck to it, but it basically comes back to, um, good management practices, good, understanding your financial records, uh, that's one thing where my father, my father's generation was, the business aspect of it was not the important thing, just the actual physical work was the important thing. As I have, uh, grown older in agriculture, I understand the business concept of it, and you have to run it as a business. You don't become personally attached to that bushel of corn or anything else, and, and you can't sit there and say, I'm going to hit a home run every time, because you'll strike out, that, kinda like Babe Ruth, he hit a lot of home runs, but he struck out a lot. So, you have to use business sense, and I think that's where, today especially, uh, agriculture has to be a business sense oriented, uh, uh, way of doing things, um, you, I, I've been successful on, in some people's eyes, but it's because of being raised very conservative, watching the business side of things, working hard, sacrificing other things, uh, along the way. Uh, I see young farmers wanting to start out and there's dues to pay, just like with everything else, and it's, I love to tell. [Thompson: I felt, I was gonna say, I felt a little personal there]. It is, I love this young couple, they, they [Thompson: well, he gave my husband a three-acre farm]. Oh. [Thompson: I said, Bob, you're killing me with a three-acre farm]. I can't farm it, okay? My equipment's too big, and I'm not gonna mess with it, and so I give it to her husband. I probably shouldn't have done that, because it's not, it doesn't make good business sense.[Thompson: It doesn't. You're talking business here.] I know, yeah, but.... [Thompson: So, but off the record, I'll talk to you some more about that.] Yeah. But, but, uh, anyhow, it is, and, and at my stage in life, uh, I have done the sweat, I've done the blood, I've done the crying. I've, I've, this is, uh, uh, this is my, uh, let's see, 18, this is my 46th, 47th, this is my 48th crop year. I've seen it all. I've seen the floods. I've seen the droughts. I've seen hot weather, dry weather, cold weather, and I've, I've persevered, uh, that comes back a lot to my character as a person and everything, uh, but, uh, there again, it has to be so business-oriented today, and as farms get larger, I mean, uh, there's farms farming tens of thousands of acres, and they handle it from a purely business side, and, uh, it makes it difficult, uh, there are, there are young farmers that look at my operation, and go, man, I wish I could be like them, they have everything. I look at operations that are five, ten times larger than me, and go, man, I wish that I was like that, but then again, you know what? At my age, I'm thinking, no, I'll let the next generation worry about

that. It's just, uh, it's up to them what to do. The next generation, um, it's hard to go out and just jump into agriculture on your own any more, if not impossible to do, you have got to have a start either from a family that's in the business, or from a gentleman that is retiring, has no offspring, and is willing to step up, and to not let his life, his lifetime of work go away, and help a young person get started. That is about the only two ways to, to get started in agriculture today.

[Thompson] And, and you've made a good point about the large-scale farmers, and how has that impacted, sort of, these small to medium farms, you know, that I, which I would say, are even close to 2,000 acres, but you're looking at these big farmers, who, like you're saying, they have 10-, 20-, maybe 30,000 acres that they're tending to, so what kind--how does that impact these farm families, who they've made the decision, it's been in the family for generations, they, that they're competing against, you know, these large-scale farmers, and it, it makes it difficult, to, to succeed, in some instances.

[Miller] Yeah. And this is, this is, uh, I mean, this is, this is how the agriculture landscape has changed. A lot of, a lot of people have had a grandparent or a great-grandparent grow up on a farm, and the farm's been part of their heritage. I farm for, for some people now that are the second generation. They came to grandpa's farm and now they own grandpa's farm, but they don't come back to grandpa's farm, and so that personal, that personal relationship is gone, and so they just want a return on their investment. They don't have that connectivity and that's, that's one thing that a lot of people in agriculture face, is that they don't have that connection, and so when this large-scale operation decides they want to come in, and they just, they call that, that, uh, that land owner in New Jersey, and go, hey, we're in the area, I can guarantee you x amount of dollars to the acre. I will send you a check once a year, twice a year, and we'll, we'll, we'll take care of it, and we'll just go from there. And they go, that sounds pretty cool, you know, I'm gonna get a 2% or 3% return on my investment. That's okay, you know, and, uh, and so, you lose that. Now, with that being said, when there are those large operations that come in like that, it also opens up opportunities for young people or a farmer to be able to drive a tractor, plant crops, till the soil, smell the dirt, but yet he just works for a paycheck. And so, but it does give the opportunity, and I, I know a young man right now, that him and his sons work for one of those large operations, and they turned over 9,000 acres for him, with machinery to farm, and to manage and to take care of. Now, if financial things turn around, and all of a sudden this huge, conglomerate farm can't make it, then this young, this young man and his two sons will be looking for employment somewhere else, but right now, it's really good, and, uh, as times have changed, it's like any other business, as some businesses grow larger, they become more efficient. Uh, the young man that farms this 50,000 acres right now, he has his own agronomy staff, he has his own marketing staff, he has somebody working on that all the time, so it has become a, not a mom and dad, not a family lifestyle, but it has become a big business, and it's managed as that big business, but so it, it takes away from the family, it takes away from that closeness, that, uh, that good feeling that we like to have, that we think agriculture is, but it's getting farther and farther away from that as the generations are, are removed. Uh, I made, I made mention that we do have a next generation coming back to the farm. I have a, a niece that's in agriculture retail. I have a



nephew that is finishing up his ag degree and will be back to take on the production side of agriculture, but I myself, I have three daughters, and one daughter and her husband want to continue on with their outside income to purchase farmland, to keep the farm going down for the next generation or two, so, uh, that's really exciting for me, because I thought, oh, it's done and it's over with, I'll turn it over to my nephew, but now that I have part of my family that has left the farm, they want to come back and still continue to see it grow and continue on, so that, that makes me happy, from that aspect.

[Thompson] And, and I can, I can relate to those rural changes, because I don't feel those personal connections. You know, I can hear my mom tell the stories of growing up on a farm, but I didn't grow up on a farm. Can you take us down memory lane and just share some of that nostalgia with us. What are some of your favorite memories, and maybe even some funny or disappointing ones about growing up on the farm. You talked about some of the sacrifices, um, you talk about some of the physical work, and how hard that was. So, tell, kind of give us a sense of, of, of what that felt like, as a, as a kid, some personal stories, if you don't mind.

[Miller] Oh, I don't mind, if you don't mind listening [Thompson laughs], I don't mind sharing it with you. Um, so, grew up with, uh, three younger brothers, very, we were very work oriented. Um, there, we did not have, as we got older, and as we increased our, our livestock part of the operation, uh, um, gosh, I mean, the summer days were like this, you got up of the morning, uh, we probably, as the boys, we probably didn't get up until 6 or 6:30, most mornings, but we had chores to do--there was always livestock to feed, there was barns to clean out, we did work in the garden with, with mom and everything. Uh, I remember going and pick blackberries, you know, uh, and things like that. Uh, I remember walking down to, uh, to one of our woods, where we had cattle, we had an old pitcher pump, uh, in the creek, and we would pump water for the cattle, in that particular part of the, of the woods, when that, when the creek would, that particular creek would run dry, we would pump water. Um, we were always outside, uh, I guess those were some of the good things, we were always outside, we lived on a farm that had a lot of woods, and, and when we worked, not that we worked all the time, but we had a lot of play time, that, that we could run up and down the woods. Uh, we'd find a grapevine, and swing on it, uh, we would make forts, uh, uh, we always had a hay mound. Of course, to have hay in the hay mound, you had to bale hay, which was labor intensive, but, uh, there were always those aspects, we always had, uh, the livestock, we always had cats around, um, um, learned how to milk a cow. Uh, you know, those kinds of things. You learned a lot about life and death on a farm. Uh, when, before we had what we call in the industry, a farrowing crate, we would put a mother sow that was going to deliver her babies, we would put her in a square pen, and we would corner off one corner, and hang a heat lamp there for warmth, but she would make a nest with the, with the straw bedding, and she would lay down, and she would start to have her babies, and then, maybe, she would stand right up, and if you weren't there to watch, she'd just decided, in labor, to lay right back down, and she might lay on her baby. So, we saw life, we saw life, which is really cool, and we saw death. Uh, why and how come, and what happened, and it makes you appreciate a lot more about what life is, and, and how valuable it is,

and, but it is just a fact of life, that you have life and death on, on the farm, but, um, um, but we had, we had gardens, we had, we had cricks we could play in. Uh, we, we just got to run around a lot, uh, but we, but we, we worked hard, there were always those summer jobs, there was always, always fence to build, they're, just those continual things, things on the farm, uh, when we got, uh, as we got into school, uh, we did not have to get up and do chores, before we went to school, but as soon as we got home, there were chores to do, there was just, uh, there was always work to do, uh, uh, summertime, wintertime, with livestock, always, always those chores to do, um, I guess my, some of my best, best memories are just, uh, growing up outside, and, uh, wearing shorts, and going barefoot, and, uh, cha-, we chased animals, uh, you know, we would, uh, we would, we would, we didn't try to ride any cattle, but the sows out in the woods, we would try to ride on them, you know, and sometimes it was good, sometimes it was a bad, we'd all have a few broken limbs, and arms and scratches and cuts, and those kinds of things, we got, we got tough. We had neighbors, you know, and, uh, we had chances to, uh, to, uh, go down the road, under the bridge, over to the neighbor's, and we would play with the neighbor boys, we had, we had neighbors, uh, the road that I grew up on, there was only one family that had any girls, all the rest of us was boys, so the girls were, well, it was her mom and her aunt were the cherriest girls in the neighborhood, you know, and I was fortunate enough to live right down the road, and we rode, we rode ponies together, and they always had horses and ponies, and we got to, to ride them, but we always had that, we always, we, back then, we spent time as neighbors to vist one another. Today, it's a little tougher, because we're, we're always on the go, and, and that kind of stuff.

[Thompson] And, and it, that's what I was thinking, when you were sitting here talking about the things that you did, like I feel like I'm on my kids to go outside. They want to be inside, you know, on their phone, or, even, you know, reading a book over being outside, or whatever it may be, I, I have a hard time even getting them outside to enjoy it, and, you know, a lot of values have changed, um, from growing up on the farm to current day. What are some of the values you've seen shift, from farm life to today? [Miller: Oh.] As far as family values, and just your, your perspective on that?

[Miller] There again, when we grew up, fam-, family was important, but we all worked together, I mean, it was a family unit, we all worked together, mom and dad and the kids, we were all there together. It wasn't like we were our city cousins, given that terminology, that mom, maybe, was a stay-at-home mom, and dad worked at a factory, and that kind of stuff, but when Friday night at 5 o'clock, the work week was over with, and Saturdays, you got to do things, and go places, and if you worked in town, you got a two-week vacation that you'd take off and go, and growing up, growing up, out in the country with livestock and crops, you just didn't have those oportunties to, uh, to do that. The values that I see, the values that I gained, and the values that I think my, my daughters have, is the fact that, growing up on the farm, there's those jobs and those responsibilities that have to be done. I don't care whether you don't like it or not, you have to do that. Um, when I grew up, we had two channels on a black and white TV--that's it! There were no ce-, and there was a party line. There were no cell phones, there was no electronics, but with that being said, our generation that grew up then, we are the ones that gave the

technology and all the stuff to kids today, because we used our imaginations. We built, we built forts, we built guns, we fixed wagons, we, we, we made slingshots, and we improved slingshots, and we did a lot of those, we did a lot of those things, and I firmly believe that, that aspect of, again, what life was all about, what hard work was all about, about, uh, being truthful and honest, not that those can't be anywhere else, but they were so prevalent, as, as, as we grew up, because family was the whole thing, and our family, on Sundays, we did not labor in the fields, we took care of the livestock, and, and, uh, there was always the church time, and then Sunday afternoons was a time to unwind, and in the summertime, maybe after we got a little older, mom and dad would take us to the family pond, and we spent time fishing, or, and I know that it was probably a dread on them, they didn't want to do that on their Sunday afternoons, but they would take us fishing or swimming, you know, in the, in the family, uh, in the family pond, um, we also, we also knew where our food come from. We understood if you wanted fried chicken, you got the chicken, and you took an ax, and a block of wood, and you chopped it's head off, you let it flop around, and then you dunked it in the hot, boiling water, you plucked all the feathers off, and got all stinky, and, but that was how you had fried chicken. And if you wanted green beans, you had to hoe the weeds and get the green beans, and break the green beans, and, and if mom wanted help canning or whatever, that's how you got those things, that's how you ate, that's where your food came from, and so you appreciated it, uh, a whole lot more, and my mom was one of those that you put it on your plate and you eat it, whether you like it or not, you ate it, that was it, there was no discussions about, well, I don't like that, that's tough, that's the way it was, so, uh, it's really funny, uh, my wife grew up in town, and she rode bicycles and went swimming, and had neighborhood get-togethers, and played kickball, and softball, and she said, you must have had a terrible childhood. No, I didn't. We didn't know any better. [Thompson laughs] As I talk to everybody that grew up in my generation, and grew up out in the countryside, we didn't know any better. I mean, that's just, that was just life, that's what was expected, and that's how we did it, and we didn't complain, because, that, you, you didn't complain. Um, because that's just how it was.

[Thompson] But you didn't really have any alternatives, either, and I think [Miller: Oh no] that's a big change today is, you know Jamie and I were just recently, our head librarian, and I were recently talking about just our society and just the instant gratification. You know, if I want, um, chicken, I can go to McDonald's or to [Miller: to the store], the store, and I can get that. I don't have to wait, [Miller: yeah, you don't have to wait] for that whole process [Miller: yeah] you know, to get there, and so I think that those dynamics have certainly changed our society, which then [Miller: yeah] changes these large-scale farms, because the demand [Miller: that's true] is so high [Miller: yeah, and I], so it's just sort of this cycle that....

[Miller] There is, it goes in cycles, and now we're back on the other side of that, where, where we have people with the financial resources that, you know what?, I know it's going to cost more, but I want to know where my chicken come from. I want it raised outside. I mean, I've got three daughters like that, that they buy at Whole Foods. They don't mind, they have the financial wherewith that they don't mind

spending it, but there's a segment, there is a segment that their income does not allow that. There is a part of the world that wants to be fed, and, and they want that product as, as, as, uh, inexpensive as they can, and sometimes when I have these conversations with people, uh, and I ask them this, you don't build your own car, do you? No, well, so, you don't have your own garden, so you gotta rely on, on somebody else, and so, and with that being said, there are those opportunities for those niche markets, if you live in the right place, and have the right clientele, that you can go back, and I've, I've seen that in some young farm families that do not want the modernization, they do not want, um, high-end productivity. They want to go back to that simple lifestyle, raise their kids out, let them see the values of taking care of animals and having chores, and having responsibilities to do. I, I see that, uh, coming back in certain areas, and just kudos to them, but if you're going to be in mainstream agriculture and world production agriculture, it comes back to using the technology, and mass, mass production, and those kind of things, so, but, uh, the heartaches of growing up is just dealing with what mother nature gives you sometimes, and it's just like why and how come? To, uh, to put all your time and effort and energy into a crop, and the weather doesn't, it just isn't there, it's just like, wow, I just put all my energy into this and it's not there, and so, uh, so, what we do is we cut back a little bit. I mean, that's just it right there, you know, uh, you can't do that. Um, the heartache of, um, seeing, um, young farmers or even older farmers that because of maybe circumstances out of their control, the markets, the, the, uh, interest rates, uh, maybe they haven't had the wherewith to capitalize and buy real estate, and they've had to rent it off of somebody else, and they lose it, and they have to sell out, and go some place else, and I've seen that happen time and time again, uh, a 55-year-old man that's farmed all of his life, and, and not that he hasn't been good at what he does, but because of those circumstances has said, I can't do it any more, and he has to go, uh, find a job somewhere else, so those are some of the things that are probably hardest, uh, on me right now as an individual, to, to, to see that happen. Um, but, uh, anyway.

[Thompson] Well, thank you so much for coming today. Is there anything else that you can think of, that you wanted to add to the conversation? We may have another opportunity to talk about some additional questions, if we think of them, but....

[Miller] Okay. I mean, I really, I can, I can go on for hours talking about certain issues and certain things, but to try to give you a broad scope, but hopefully, I've instilled in you where I've come from. Um, I've been blessed in so many ways, uh, I've also had the opportunities to be involved in some agricultural organizations, which helps me connect with other people from other places around the country, around the world. Uh, I've been very fortunate to, I, uh, serve on a, uh, a local ag co-op that, that supplies fuel, and fertilizer, and seed and feed. It's one of the largest co-ops in the state of Illinois, if not the largest independent co-op, and it's really changed my business sense, it's opened me up to a whole lot of things, it's changed the way I operate my business, uh, to be part of an organization that, uh, I mean, it's about a \$400,000,000 dollar a year business, and to make those decisions, and so, uh, that's, that's just helped me tremendously to bring some of those ideas back to my own, my own farming operation, and, and to keep it, you know going, going forward. I love, I love being a farmer. I always have been. Uh,

don't get me wrong, there are those times, I have a broken finger, because of livestock. Um, I've had broken legs, because of equipment, um, I've had broken ribs, because of things. I mean, it's, not that it's a dangerous occupation, but those things do happen once in a while, so, uh, but, uh....

[Thompson] Well, if, if you were to give one final word to, um, future farmers, um, what would be your advice to them?

[Miller] Uh, wow. I'm trying to think of a young man right now, um, persevere, uh, work hard, manage, manage hard, uh, always have a positive attitude. When things don't go right, when equipment breaks down, and I know it's hard to do, when the markets stop, keep a positive attitude, that's, that is the, and enjoy. Enjoy that you have the opportunity to be a part of producing food or fiber for somebody else, and just, just enjoy it. That's it.

[Thompson] All right. Thanks so much, Robert.

[Miller] You're welcome.