

**March 6, 2013**

**Andrews View Farm**

**Project: Archie Green Fellowship: Dairy Farm Workers in Northern NY**

**Interviewer: Hannah Harvester (HH)**

**Interviewees: Bob (Robert) Andrews (BA), partner in farm with Diane Andrews (not present)**

**Transcribed by: Mimi Rooney**

(0:00:00)

HH: I am Hannah Harvester with TAUNY and I am here with Bob Andrews at the Andrews View Farm in Fowler and this is our second interview speaking about Bob and Diane's farm. Bob, would you start out by describing the work on your farm season by season?

BA: Let's start out with the constancies. The constancies are chores every morning and every night: the milking of the cows, the feeding of the cows and so forth. That is constant 365 days a year. That is what we call barn chores. Then you got the seasonality. Right now being March we're getting prepared for spring. That means I am lining up all my fencing materials, lining up all my seed, fertilizer and chemicals so that I can plant hopefully in late May and early June. My goal is to start utilizing my pastures by the first day of May so I won't be dependent on stored feed, so that is what we are getting things prepared for. Of course this time of year is the time you take advantage of the educational opportunities, like yesterday I went to Watertown and took a pesticide course in corn and we had some topics on hay and also a little bit about soybeans to get some DEC credits so I can renew my pesticide license, so that is what I did yesterday.

(0:01:56)

HH: Is that through Extension?

BA: Yes, that is through Jefferson County Extension and the New York State Environmental Department of Conservation. That is one thing that is going on. Of course I continually go for education and assessing because I am an Assessor for the town of Fowler, and that is a constant change as you would imagine, especially with the proposal to prevent fraud in the Star Program. I don't know if you are familiar with that; that is where you get a rebate and don't have to pay school taxes and so forth and the State of New York is going to be breaking down and prosecuting people for fraud in that program. So we are getting things wind up so we don't have too many cases like that in the town of Fowler; we are doing some checking right now.

Another thing going on this time of year is my extracurricular activities. I chair the Soil and Water District for St. Lawrence County and I also chair the Farm Protection Board for St. Lawrence County. Tomorrow night, the 7<sup>th</sup>, we are going to be talking about our big Ag Tour and the changing face of land utilization in St. Lawrence County. I've been doing some prep work in getting that done for that meeting.

(0:03:19)

HH: Are those both volunteer positions?

BA: Oh, absolutely.

HH: How much of your work life goes into those board positions?

BA: Well, I also sit on the North Country Ag Development, which is a 6 county conjecture, and it is the only organization in the State of New York that is farmer-led to guide Cornell University in their research projects, so I am very proud of my involvement with that one. I also sit on the steering committee for the senior citizens home hear. They had some serious problems for a number of years and we are finally getting them financially squared away and in good shape. So those are my extracurricular activities besides being an Assessor for the Township.

(0:04:07)

HH: The Assessor is a paid position?

BA: It's a paid position, I made a whole 3800 dollars a year for that.

HH: The last time I was here you mentioned you had done a calculation and mentioned the farm was bringing in 20% of the family income, so that is the farm, Diane's part time job, and that would be the only other income as the Assessor?

BA: Yep, last year on this farm I do a pretty good job managing what we have here for assets and what we have for milk. We do pretty good as far as pounds of milk for cow and so forth, but 2012, when I sat down and done all of the tax preparations and so forth, the reality is I sold milk for 7 months out of 12 for less than cost of production. That was because milk prices were so depressed. I never in my thirty-five years here on the farm as proprietor have seen my expenses go up so fast in every aspect of what I purchase and bring in to utilize on the farm.

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HH: That was largely due to the drought or other factors as well?

BA: Fuel prices; everything related to fuel has gone astronomically high. When we sat down and done the books my fuel expenses were over \$6,000 greater this year than they were in 2011 just in diesel fuel and gasoline. My buildings here, my house, we burn no oil, it's 100% wood.

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HH: I want to get back to the season my season, but the boards that you sit on, I found those to be something that a lot farmers are very involved in, that sounds like that is very important to you. Why do you take the time to serve on these boards?

BA: Number 1, Soil and Water is my passion. Water is the absolute elixir of life, okay? When I went through college, Canton College, then I went into the Navy, and after I got established in the Navy we went through what they call Preventative Medicine School, and my first course was Water Quality, Epidemiology, Microbiology, Public Health, all that good stuff, and the importance of water is the elixir of life and there is no doubt about that. I've had a lot of training in Soil and Water Conservation programs. I took Soil and Water when I went to college when I was going through the Agronomy Programs, and the management of water is very important. The essence of life is that 6 to 8 inches of soil that we have on our tillable acreage, and water. That is why I am interested in soil and water. It is the basic ingredients for life. It is misused, it's under used, and it's mismanaged. If I can do a little bit to help solve some of that problem, I've invested my time very wisely, that is the way I feel about it. As far as farm land protection is concerned, I helped create the Farmland Protection Board, we even wrote bylaws for the Farmland Protection Board. When we come up with our plan for the Farmland Protection Board, our management plan, it was copied by the state of Vermont and 21 other counties in the state of New York, so we were very diligent in this creation that was well received state wide and even up in Vermont. We are seeing a tremendous amount of change in land utilization in St Lawrence County right now. Acres that haven't been plowed or tilled in years are coming back into production. The demand for land is constantly going up. In this last year alone we have seen land values increase over \$500 an acre in St. Lawrence County. I believe in land management. When I was in Japan, when the Navy sent me to Japan, every square *tsubo* was utilized, even on the side of the road they were growing fruit trees. What a difference in St Lawrence County compared to complete and total land utilization, and now we are seeing some real interest in it.

(0:09:18)

HH: Let's get back to going through the year on the farm. You said you are planting by late May.

BA: That is the goal. On this farm we plant late May, and right now I am trying to get all my materials lined up. We have already sent one tractor to the shop to have a new clutch put into it. I've got some tires I want to have changed, big rear tires on my tractor, and I am getting that all lined up right now. So when the weather breaks and the ground conditions are correct, I will be in the fields. Hopefully, by the middle of May, the very first of June, I can start haying again and refilling my silos and making round bales. I am trying to get all my materials lined up for that.

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HH: So you will already start harvesting in late May. When are you planting?

BA: May. I will be planting oats, a new seeding, and corn whenever I get an opportunity in May, and I am hoping I can start cutting hay and putting it in the silos in May and the first of June. The sooner I harvest the first crop, the sooner I can get the second crop.

(0:10:46)

HH: Can you explain the difference in the round bales and the square bales, and why some people have their round bales distributed throughout their fields and others have them in plastic in a row. Why the differences and what do you do with your hay exactly?

BA: The big mushroom bales that you see, they are usually what we refer to as wet bales. That means that the dry matter content is wet, so you wrap them in plastic like that and they become miniature silos. Once you get them into position and drop them, they are perfectly sealed and become vacuum tight and go from aerobic to anaerobic. It is a very good way of making the right size amount of feed for a certain number of cows. It's a wonderful way when you run out of storage space. It's a wonderful way to harvest when the weather conditions aren't right. If your hay is a little wet and it's too dry to be put up as dry hay, but yet you know there is another storm coming, you can go harvest this hay and have your moisture level, wrap it in plastic, and not have to worry about that second rain storm and so forth. There are 3 types of hay, or 4 types of hay. You got chopped hay that goes in the silo or the bunker, you've got the round bales like I talked to you about that are wrapped in plastic, you have the dry bales that are down to 90% dry matter, you know that are dry and you don't put any plastic on them, and then you see these big square bales when you go up and down the road. These big square bales are designed for transportation. Most of these big square bales are either 3 by 3 by 8 or 4 by 4 by 8. They are designed to go on tractor trailers. They weigh in at an excess of a ton a piece, so you have to have mechanization in order to move them.

(0:13:00)

HH: I don't think I have ever seen those.

BA: You've never seen the big square bales.

HH: I don't think so. I have seen the small square bales.

BA: They are all up and down Route 11. A lot of hay is being transported down to Pennsylvania for mushroom farms, not to mention that those big square bales wrapped in plastic range between \$175 and \$225 a piece right now. When you see them, they are designed to be loaded on transportation, tractor trailers and moved.

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HH: So how many cuttings of hay do you do in a year?

BA: In a good year we get 3 on this farm. We always seem to be able to get 2, and some years we get 3.

HH: So your last haying would be?

BA: Late September, October. You want to have at least 45 days between each cutting.

(0:14:08)

HH: What other crops do you grow?

BA: We grow a little bit of oats. We establish new grass. I've really, really come into this new Kentucky Tall Fescue. I am really impressed with the tonnage on that, and of course we plant corn.

(0:14:30)

HH: How many acres of crop land do you have?

BA: 345 tillable acres and 200 acres of pasture and another 200 odd acres of forest.

(0:14:50)

HH: I know you spread manure; do you use other fertilizers, too?

BA: Very little. I purchase what we refer to as starter fertilizer for my corn. By having a good manure management plan I am very fortunate and able enough to have enough manure that I can fertilize my fields with that. So I don't buy any more than 4 or 5 tons of fertilizer a year.

HH: That is just for the corn?

BA: Just for the corn. Sometimes I put a little starter fertilizer on my new seedings.

(0:15:30)

HH: You mentioned last time we spoke that you have very wet land here, are there other things you need to do to manage that moisture?

BA: Any management program, you have to match up planting seeds—you know, like we do not grow any alfalfa on this farm. Alfalfa is a waste of money here, so I grow clovers. I grow grasses, and I can make some real good tonnage on grasses. You have to match the seeds to your land capabilities. We have to maintain pH, we have to maintain fertility and you'll get the tonnage to justify harvesting a crop, a quality crop, a nutritious crop. And that takes years to establish what works on your farm.

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HH: So you do trial and error. You just can't test the soil and say that these are the seeds that are going to work?

BA: You always try a little bit of error, you always have to have little bit of error, but like I was saying, I am involved with this North Country Ag Development. And the research projects that we spearhead for the Cornell University to do the research on, a lot of that material is why I come up with what I am going to plant and how I am going to plant. Since I've started doing that, my tonnage has gone up, my failures have gone down, and I have been quite successful by paying attention to the research. Now you take corn. Corn, you get good tonnage on corn. I grew as much as 25 tons to the acre of corn silage on this wet, heavy farm. But the secret is you plant later than most farmers, and you harvest earlier than most farmers because of your soil conditions. So you get a seed that is going to meet those requirements, that likes a little warmer soil temperature when you put it into the ground, it matures faster, and it has

what they call a fast dry down characteristic, so that when you do harvest it and put it in the silo, it's not going to run all the juice out. Dry matter is very important in crop storage, dry matter content.

(0:18:08)

HH: Knowing that amount--can you actually test that, or is that by feel.

BA: You can actually test it, but I have the capability of putting in my hand and squeezing it and seeing how much moisture is on my hand, and I can come pretty close. Of course I can't match the laboratory, but I can come close.

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HH: Is there anything else you want to say about what goes into cropping and the decisions there?

BA: Well, you're making a big investment, not only is it a financial investment that you are making in your cropping, but it is a long term to make sure you got enough feed to feed your cows. So you've gotta be thinking, not only short term, but you got to be thinking a year plus in advance in order to make sure you got enough feed, quality feed, in order to take them from one crop cycle to the next.

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HH: You are buying some of your feed?

BA: We buy a supplement grain from the grain company.

HH: But everything else is. . .

BA: . . .homegrown.

HH: Your cows are pastured how many months of the year?

BA: They are outdoors between the 1<sup>st</sup> of May until last year it was well into November. I have had to put my cows in the barn the 13<sup>th</sup> of September because it was so wet and muddy, but not recently.

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HH: So, turning to your animals . . .

BA: You want to go through the rest of the seasons?

HH: Yes, yes I do.

BA: We've talked about spring and preparation for spring planting and so forth. As soon as I get done planting, I go right into harvest mode. Now I mentioned earlier that we fill the silos. That is the first thing we do, we fill them with hay. Then we go and start making square bales. Square bales go into the haymow.

HH: Those are the big ones?

BA: No, these are the small ones, the 35 to 40 pound bales. And we'll make 12 to 14,000 of them. At one time we were making 33,000 square bales on this farm a year before I put up the second silo and bought the round baler. 33,000 and it was getting to the point that was all we ever done was haying, constantly, and that's a lot of square bales. But now we're down to 12 or 14,000 a year.

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HH: The square bales are more time intensive than using the silo or the round bales.

BA: Absolutely because you have to dry them down. If you put a wet square bale into your barn, you are going to burn your barn down because of combustion. So you have to be very conscious of what you're doing, they have to be harvested at a certain dry matter content, and it's intensive labor, even with a kicker baler; you have to unload the wagon, put it in the barn, and then stack it from there.

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HH: You do continue to make them, so what kind of particular purpose do the square bales serve?

BA: I don't have enough storage in silos and in round bales. I have the haymow, all bought and paid for. The baler is all bought and paid for, and the wagons are all bought and paid for, so I utilize them. And, by putting that hay in the barn, it helps insulate, so that my barns are at a better temperature for the winter.

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HH: Do you use that all for feed, or also as bedding?

BA: We put up bedding also and that is another 12 to 15 hundred square bales. We have a bedding chopper and chop it underneath the cows. And that's summer. Then fall is making sure the buildings are all ready to go for winter, making sure that the corn is harvested and put in the silo, making sure that we got our plowings and preparation for spring taken care of, and not to mention putting wood in the cellar and getting ready for winter.

(0:22:37)

HH: You're doing things to prepare your fields for the spring in the fall?

BA: In the fall, yes. Especially plowing. On this heavy soil, if we plow it in the fall, you've got the soil exposed, it's so heavy we don't have to worry about erosion because our meadows are flat and so forth, but when it freezes and thaws, it helps break and loosen the soil so it makes a much better seed bed in the spring, so that's why we try to plow in the fall.

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HH: So that is not something every farmer would be doing?

BA: No, a farmer on lighter soils wouldn't even consider it.

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HH: When do you spread manure?

BA: I try to spread manure year round if the weather allows me. I do not spread on snow unless I am forced to. We do have a manure storage facility, it's semi solid. I will not go to liquid, but I do have a semi-solid system. We have 3 storage pads here that we put manure on and then in the spring we harvest it and put it on the meadows to help the grass grow and corn and so forth.

HH: You wouldn't put it on snow because of run off?

BA: Run off, yeah. Manure is a valuable resource and there is no sense putting it on top of snow and having it run down the creek. It looks bad, it is bad for water, and we are losing money when we do it.

(0:24:20)

HH: So that is fall, then winter is?

BA: You come right back to the routine of maintaining the barns and doing chores and going to schools and getting ready for the holidays.

HH: Is that when you would do some more of your long term planning as well?

BA: Planning, yeah. Yep.

(0:24:40)

HH: I want to talk a little bit more about your animals. Are your cows all eating the same mixture, and how do you determine what you are feeding them?

BA: My cows are broken down like this: you have milking cows, you got dry cows, you got heifers that are going to freshen, you have heifers that are open that haven't been inseminated yet, and then you have calves. My milking cows are getting haylage and corn silage mixed together, then I give them their minerals, and they get a round bale outdoors to chew on, and then they get square bales in the barn to eat during the night, and then of course they get their concentrate. I base their concentrate feeding on how many pounds of milk they are, and how far along they are in their lactation. I try to get all my cows to milk at least 305 days a year with a 60 day rest period. Then at the end of the 60 day rest period they're supposed to have a calf and start all over again. Then you got the dry cows, the ones that are in that 60 day dry period. I do not feed them corn silage, I feed them a very small amount of haylage because everything they are doing is maintaining their body and building the calf, they are not producing milk. They also get a mineral and a very small amount of concentrate.

HH: What is the concentrate?

BA: Concentrate is corn and soybean mixed together. We call it grain.



HH: Is that high protein?

BA: I have 2 grain mixtures that I have here. I have a 13 % and I have a 26%. I feed the 13% high energy, a small amount to all of my milkers one time a day and then I have a 26% that I feed on a per pound basis in relation to the pounds of milk they produce.

HH: So that would be cow by cow?

BA: Individually, yes.

HH: How are you keeping these records? Do you have computer program? Are you keeping this on paper?

BA: We have been a member of Dairy One DHIA since 1961. And they come in, in fact they're coming tomorrow morning, and every cow is milked, weighed, samples sent down to Cornell or Ithaca, and the milk has an analysis done on it to determine how much butterfat, protein, other solids and what their somatic cell count is on each individual cow. Then the computer tells me how many pounds of milk she is producing during her lactation, if she's pregnant, when she's supposed to be dried off, when she's supposed to have her calf, and that's the management system we use.

HH: Someone is coming in, getting that analyzed, and sending it to you?

BA: Yep, and we maintain the records, the records are right there, and go from there. But every cow is an individual. In fact, I had a heifer freshen the other day, and I put tag number 979 on, and since 1978, I'm getting close to 1000 heifers that I have raised on this farm. That was my goal, 1000. And I've got enough bred heifers that we should be there by May, or the very first of June. But that's a lot, a thousand is a lot for an operation this size. And we've maintained 100% registry on all of our animals which is very rare. This dairy is also rare in the fact that there has not been a purchased animal on this farm since 1964. We are called a closed dairy and our genetic pool is one of the highest ones in the country, genomic pool.

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HH: So this will be good for you when you are eventually selling your animals?

BA: Yes, I am planning on it anyway, to make it more valuable.

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HH: What is your average milk production for your animals?

BA: We have achieved as high as 23,500 pounds of milk per cow. I changed my strategy and I cut back on the concentrates, the grain, because of the high prices. I'm still meeting the nutritional requirements, but I'm not pushing my cows as heavy as I have in the past, so we're just a little bit under 19,000 right now. Actually, it got to the point on an individual cow basis where the high grain feeding that my income over feed costs were way out of line. And, as I said earlier, I've sold milk for the last 7 months of this last

year for less of cost of production and that's why I lowered my production per cow trying to keep it as low as possible. I know it's hard to fathom, but by reducing production, you can produce milk cheaper, but in my case I can do it.

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HH: I think I interrupted you when you were describing how you feed the different group of cows. You were saying . . .

BA: I break them up into groups. I told you how I feed the milkers. Then I told you how I feed the dry cows and I didn't mention on the heifers that are getting ready to have babies, I try to do what they call lead feed them. And that's where you try to get the bugs and bacteria in their stomachs in their rumen used to the feed that's coming so they don't have a big shock all of a sudden when they get a feed change. Those animals are getting a little bit of grain, a little bit of corn, a little bit of haylage, a little bit of square bales, but they are not getting those second cutting round bales outdoors yet, but they will as we progress onward. Of course, the calves; the calves don't eat as much as a big cow. So they're getting a little bit of haylage and dry hay and a concentrate, the 13%.

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HH: What is your approach to vaccinations, medications, and vitamins?

BA: We do supplement with a mineral. We're in what they call a low selenium area where even my grasses will always come up low in selenium in a laboratory analysis. So I feed a mineral to the cows. I provide a mineralized salt block to the animals when they are outdoors, so yes, I do supplement. Vitamins, nobody pays attention to vitamins in a cow; minerals, yes. Vaccinations. Because of the high deer population, I vaccinate religiously for leptosporosis. If a deer comes along and pees in a water puddle and then a cow comes along and drinks it that is how you spread leptosporosis. Lepto will cause a cow to drop her cow or abort, so we vaccinate for that religiously. A cow can come down with pneumonia or respiratory problems, so we vaccinate for respiratory diseases. And those are the two main—oh, and chicken fever, which is pneumonia, which we vaccinate for also. Those are the 3 major things I vaccinate for.

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HH: Are you doing that, or do you have a vet do that?

BA: I buy the materials from the veterinarian and do it myself.

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HH: What would you bring in a vet for?

BA: The veterinarian was here Saturday. The veterinarian comes in and checks each animal at 30 to 40 days after having calves, to make sure their uterus and everything is clean and ready for the acceptance of semen because we try to bring them back at 60 to 90 days. After we do breed them, and they do

confirm pregnant, the veterinarian will tell me if they are pregnant or not pregnant so I can mark them down on the books. If they're not pregnant, I can take steps to get them pregnant again. If I have an animal that's off feed—I had an animal Saturday that bumped her knee, and it swoll quite big, and turned into an abscess, so we cut that and drained that, and she's doing very well right now. I had a calf with an abscess on the side of its face and we drained that. We talk about mastitis control. My policy since the new milk quality regulations have come into place, if I have a cow that I can't clean up with therapy or treatment, I sell her, so we don't do a lot with a veterinarian on mastitis control. Thank God, knock on wood, we don't have that big a problem with mastitis right now.

(0:34:46)

HH: Are you doing the breeding or do you bring in someone?

BA: I don't have enough cows where I can maintain. I wouldn't feel comfortable breeding my own cows because I don't have enough to maintain that touch, if you will. So we deal with GenX, and they come in here whenever I call them. In fact they will be here this afternoon to breed one. And the technician will breed them. Their tank will have 100 and some odd bulls in the tank, and I can pick out the one I want to breed that individual cow where as if I was trying to do it myself, I'd have to pay for that, and store it, and take a chance of the liquid nitrogen coming out of the tank and ruining it. So on my volume of cattle, I will not breed them myself. Plus, that gives me someone to talk to periodically. *(laughter)*

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HH: You were mentioning when I was here before some inventions you brought into play: the newspaper in the bedding and Ag plastic recycling. Can you talk about those kinds of things and others like that?

BA: Did I talk about my milkhouse waste treatment facility?

HH: With the wood chips? Yes.

BA: The Ag plastic, yes, I am very proud of being involved with that. That has turned around real well right now. Right now it's been reorganized with DEC and Cornell University and there's a good chance that we may have a local person who is going to be making plastic sidewalks out of plastic up here, and I'm hoping that materializes. It will be that much less out of the recycling stream.

(0:36:47)

HH: This is something you were involved in the beginning of it?

BA: In fact, our Farm Land Protection Board, Bill Van Lou and Kendal Lawrence and I went all the way down to Albany, drove down to Albany and talked to Senator Jim Wright, and he give us the \$12,000 to establish a collection of Ag plastic in St. Lawrence County and we did. And Cornell got so involved in it and DEC got so involved in it that DEC bought us a baler to bale plastic. In fact, they bought 6 of them for 6 counties, and now that we have started to get tonnage put together, we are finding the source of

recycling the products, so that's very good. What else have I got involved in over the years? Of course, the paper; I really like using the paper because it's a great fly control. You will not get a fly to lay an egg or have a maggot in the newspaper. So it controls flies in the building quite a lot.

(0:38:15)

HH: So why aren't all the farmers putting news paper into their bedding?

BA: And another thing, by putting newspaper into your bedding and spreading it on your land, you're increasing your earth worm population. And if you get those little holes from the earth worm in the soil when it rains, you get better percolation of water into the ground.

HH: Especially with your wet clay.

BA: Yes. I can remember when I first come home, Hannah, I plowed down, and I wouldn't see a night crawler. You wouldn't see a night crawler, now my ground is loaded with them, yep.

(0:38:55)

HH: That is very cool. When did you start doing that, adding the shredded newspaper?

BA: I was sitting on the Cooperative Extension Board and it was a proposal that was brought forward and I got involved with it and have been doing it ever since.

HH: Where are you getting the newspaper?

BA: Gouverneur Tribune Press and my neighbors. There again, I get to talk to my neighbors when they bring me newspapers.

HH: I guess they are happy to see it being used.

BA: And a lot of these people have farm histories around home, and just to come up to smell the cows and see the calves, they kind of like that.

(0:39:40)

HH: I want to ask you a little bit about machinery: what machines you have, how you decide what's a good investment and how important is the way you use machinery in terms of its maintenance in keeping it in good order?

BA: I maintain 3 sets of harvesting equipment. I have a round baler, I have a square baler, and I have a chopper, and that's my harvesting equipment. Then I have the wagons and hay binds and all that other stuff that go along with it. I maintain a fleet of 4 tractors, 5 tractors actually. Machinery prices have gone astronomically wild. In 1986, I bought a brand new Forage Chopper, I traded in an old Forage Chopper, and I bought this new one.

HH: Forage?

BA: Yes. I paid \$12,000 dollars for my old chopper; I have used it for 26 years. The metal is starting to get very fatigued and old. I priced a brand new chopper, comparable chopper: \$57,000. I am 61 years old and I am not going to spend \$57,000 on a brand new chopper. Tractors: I bought a brand new tractor in 1980 for \$12,000. A brand new 105 horse tractor today, 4-wheel drive cab, you're looking at \$92,000. I am not spending \$92,000. So my machinery repair is essential. My machinery is starting to get old, but it's still in good shape. I just keep it going; that's all I can do. I bought a manure spreader 7 years ago; I paid \$5,000 for it. A year ago April I bought a brand new manure spreader: \$12,800 for exactly the same machine. Yes! And when I was paying 79 cents a gallon for diesel fuel, how many years ago was that? That was a while back. My last load of diesel fuel was \$3.83. That's why I say my expenses are eating me alive, not to mention taxes and that sort of foolishness. But my milk prices Hannah, have not gone up, in fact they're starting to go down again. It really upsets me when these big dogs, especially these political representatives of ours talk about globalization, globalization, well, how can you expect a New York State dairy farmer, or a New England dairy farmer to make milk like they do in Australia or New Zealand or these other countries when you have to pay buildings and lands and taxes, where over there the cows roam free and they bring the milking parlor to them. Globalization, nice word, but it don't mean much and it's not effective to what's going on here in northern New York.

(0:43:30)

HH: The global milk price affects what you get...that's crazy.

BA: Yes. Yes it is.

HH: If you had the power to change the policy, how would you like to see it?

BA: They come through a couple of years ago and they talked about European Standards. We need to change the standards of milk quality in order for us to sell to Europe. It upset me terribly. In 1882 when my great-grandfather came to the United States, he left Europe for a reason, and that was because of their policies and the opportunities weren't there. And here we are in the United States trying to repeat what they've done over in Europe. We are not Europe; we do not need European policies. And with the food situation the way it is right now and the way it's going to be in the very near future, we don't have to worry about them accepting our standards. Our standards, numbers are maybe a little higher than theirs, but our food quality over all is a lot greater. It's too many people wearing suits making decisions, who don't know what they are talking about. Too many suits and not enough boots. *(laughter)*.

(0:45:05)

HH: I like that. Last time you said a small farmer doesn't have a snowball's chance in hell of making it the way the policies are. Why is it particularly hard for small farmers? Are the policies skewed towards larger farms?

BA: Absolutely. Larger farms today are in a position where they don't have to settle. For example, my grain prices as you know, grain has gone extremely high; I've seen my grain prices go from \$186 a ton to \$200 to \$442 a ton. I've seen my cornmeal prices alone go from \$137 to \$386 a ton, just in the last 2

years. Now I don't buy that much as far as volume is concerned, where these big farms are buying tractor trailer loads on a per day basis. They're able to buy at a lot lower discounted price than I am. So when you look at their overall volume of production compared to their expenditures, if they don't have that great a debt load, their cost of production is going to be more in line. That's like them buying diesel fuel; when a lot of these guys order diesel fuel, they will buy it by the truck load, and they will get a lot better deal than me buying 250 or 500 gallons at a time. The same thing holds true for selling their milk as far as transportation costs. I have to pay transportation costs for getting rid of my milk; these guys are paying it, yes, but at a lower rate than I am because of the volume they sell. That's why I say they can lower their cost of production.

(0:47:20)

HH: Do you think that's, well, never mind I won't ask that question.

BA: Let me put it to you this way. Right now as you and I sit here, you'll break down 550,000 pounds of milk. My wife and I are the only 2 ones working here, and we will make over 600,000 pounds of milk a piece this year, in fact we have gone over 700,000 a piece. These large production farms, when you take their total production and divide it by their number of employees, they are virtually at the same, or a little less than I am, on a per pound basis. That is the way you look at it, and another thing, a lot of these big farmers will not tell you what their actual cost of production is because they are in such financial... well they have big debts, that is what I want to say.

(0:48:25)

HH: I know you are not one of these farmers, but is the idea that eventually because of depreciation, is that with their debts they will be able to sell? I just don't understand.

BA: A lot of these big farms... I have a goal. I had a goal all my life, to build up my dairy and have good dairy of cows. I think I've got a nice farm, I know my wife and I are extremely comfortable and we have done a fairly decent job raising our 3 daughters and getting them educated, and I'm very proud of that. We are not destitute by any way, we live a good life. I have a lot of assets that we've accumulated, and I'm very proud of what we have done. My goal was to do that. A lot of these big farms today, the first thing they do in January is they write their own paycheck for the year. And, after that point if they do business with you, and you don't get paid, too bad, they got theirs. If they get in too much financial problems, their lenders will come in and take them over, and make their management decisions and so forth, receivership, and if you went looking, you'd find 2 or 3 of them around northern New York right now, and they do what their banker tells them. I wouldn't want to live my life that way, but that's the scenario. There are some big farms that are doing real well, but there are some that are in that receivership. I would not want to deal with a large number of employees. There's no climate in New York State for dealing with workman's compensation and the mandatory workmen's requirements that are put upon you, I wouldn't want to deal with that bureaucracy.

(0:50:40)

HH: So these boards that you are one, there are a lot of farmers on these boards. Is there a lot of information sharing and camaraderie between farmers?

BA: St. Lawrence County is big, land-wise big; we are one of the biggest counties east of the Mississippi River. We have a very diverse group of farmers that are scattered in a lot of geographically different types of soil types, land characteristics and so forth. There's a lot of difference between Gouverneur, New York and Massena, New York. There's a lot of difference between Hammond and Madrid/Waddington up along the river. And there's even more difference between Edwards and Lewisville up on next to the Franklin County border. It is really nice to sit down with people that you have a common interest in, and yes, we're goal oriented, we know what we want to accomplish, but it's nice to sit there and visit and see what is going on, talk about different aspects of agriculture everything from the new vegetable growers in St. Lawrence County to the maple production that's going on in St. Lawrence county to the alpacas, the buffalo, the goat, the sheep. We talk about it all. The new slaughtering houses, the new beef growing facility in Hopkington, the milk plants, needless to say we talk about the milk plants. In fact we have been involved with the new gas lines going up to North Lawrence and the Chateaugay Milk Plant. Do you realize that those gas lines will save those new milk plants over a million dollars a month in fuels costs? A month? The difference between diesel fuel to generate steam and natural gas. Yeah, big deal. So we've been involved trying to get those pipes situated and we've done that successfully.

(0:53:05)

HH: What is your plan going forward with the farm?

BA: My goal right now is 1000, and I can see that real close. If I have a cow that gives me any problems as far as medical or mastitis, I have no problem shipping her out. Yes, my numbers are going down. You can go to the barn right now and there's empty stalls in the barn. There hasn't been empty stalls in that barn for 30 years. So yes, my numbers are going down. The quality of my dairy is going up, my numbers are going down. The day is going to come when somebody comes along and say, "I want to buy your cows, I want to buy your heifers." And he's going to say, "This is how much I am going to give you." And I'll probably take it when I hear the right number, but then I am not leaving this place. This summer they sold square bales, like I was talking about, for \$3 a bale, \$3.50. I can see myself continuing to put up hay and sell it. I can see myself cutting wood. I've got 200 and some odd acres of forest land, managed forest land, that is becoming more valuable all the time as soon as the wood market changes. I don't ever foresee myself as completely retired. We have grown sweet corn on this farm and sold it in the local stores in the past. In fact that is how we built up the money for our kids to go to college. We've taken corn to Syracuse State Fair and won Master Breeders for some of our sweet corn, so I could do that again, too. We had quite a following there for sweet corn for a long time, but all of that sweet corn money that went into helping the kids go through college.

HH: You are not growing sweet corn at the moment?

BA: No, that is labor intensive and without the kids here to help, it got to be too much.

(0:55:45)

HH: Looking back over the last 35 or more years, are there any particularly good or difficult years that stick out in your mind?

BA: 1985 was extremely hard. The weather was bad, everything was bad. That was a hard year. That was the year when I was working 7 days a week, Diane and I were working 7 days a week, Bobby Jean was just born in 1984, and I had to apologize to my wife because we couldn't make ends meet by working 7 days a week. Yeah, I remember that, and that was probably the hardest. Not to mention what we went through with the ice storm in 1998 that was hard. We were without electricity here for 21 days, that was hard, but we survived that needless to say. Then we went through the microburst in 1995; that was hard.

(0:57:05)

HH: When you lose electricity, what was the biggest difficulty with that for the farming?

BA: Not able to milk the cows, not able to clean the barns, not able to water your animals. We have a generator, so we have the capability of generating our own electricity, so we hooked it up and I ran that rascal 7 days, 24 hours a day in order to maintain my buildings and so forth. We had all the neighbors here, we had relatives here, they all moved in. On the 7<sup>th</sup> day, it melted down, the dial that changes it from AC to DC literally melted down. So I went down to the police station and we got the Army Reserve or the National Guard and they put up a generator here, and we ran that for another 14 days at 60 gallons of diesel fuel a day, but we had electricity and I was shipping milk. I did put 13000 gallons of milk down the drain because I couldn't get it picked up, but that is what I lost was 13,000 out of 21 days, but I didn't lose any cattle, so we done okay, but it was hard. The fences were a solid sheet of ice from one barb wire to the next barb wire, they were solid sheets. The ice was that thick on top of the vehicles. I swear to Jesus that this was at the epicenter for it, and we picked up trees. We cut 114 cords of wood that feel down, just around the meadows, I never got into the woods. It was just like a war; when you went outdoors you could hear the trees snap and break, it was just like being in a war zone.

Highlights of my life?

(0:59:30)

HH: Yeah.

BA: My children, bringing them home. The first wedding we had here for my oldest daughter, that was pretty nice. We are going to have another one of them you know coming up this August here at the farm, that's going to be nice also. My family, there are a lot of good memories in this house, let me tell you. When I went in the service Hannah I was ready to go in the service. I was ready to go some place, see something different, experience something new in my life, I really was. I was 20 years old, I was ready for that. I have no regrets. I put in some long hours in the military. The hardest was being on that cancer ward for 15 months, I found that very hard, but I found it very rewarding in the long end because it helped me set my moral standards and help me set my goals, it gave me the appreciation of life, which



is very important for anybody. I enjoyed going overseas to see what it was in Japan and the land utilization and to meet those people and work with those people and that was all good. Everything was good; meeting Diane was good, but it gave me a level of appreciation and what I wanted to do when I came back to the farm. The farm, you got to be dedicated to is and I've said this over and over, you just can't farm it because you think you want to farm it, you have to feel for it in your heart. Because I haven't had a real vacation since 1997. I went back to my mother and father-in-laws 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary for 3 days, and that was the last real vacation I've had. I've gone away from the farm to go to training schools and stuff like that for a few days, but that wasn't my last real vacation. And how many years ago was that? 1997 to now? That was 16 years ago. You've got to be dedicated and like I said before, there's things that Diane and I want to do in this life other than milk cows every day. So yeah, we are going to phase out. She's going to phase out faster than I am probably. *(laughter)*

(1:00:17)

HH: Are you religious?

BA: That is a good question. It depends on your definition of religion. I do not go to church because I don't feel I need another man's interpretation of the Lord. I can see the Lord every day. I can see him when I am out there with the cows, I can see him when I am going to the 40 acre meadow, I can see him in the wildlife around here, I can see him in the quality of my work, I can see him, yes, I am a religious man, but not to the tune of another man's interpretation.

HH: I was just curious if your faith played a role in the way you approach your work, and even the choice to be a farmer.

BA: I do believe that there is a Lord, but I'll find him on my own standards.

(1:03:25)

HH: What are you most proud of?

BA: My children, absolutely. I'm very proud of my children. I'm very proud of the relationship I have with my wife, 35 years together, not only are we partners in marriage, but we are also partners in business and we do real well together. I really do love Diane. I am very proud of what we built for the genetic composure of my cows. That's been a lifetime effort. I know some people say, I like my home, I like my buildings, I like my part of the world. If you can put that in there for my grand children, then that is what I want.

HH: I surely will.

(1:04:30)

HH: Is there anything else you'd like to say or mention? That is all the questions I have.

BA: I am very proud of my grandchildren, too. I never thought much about grandchildren until I had them, but they steal my heart, my grandchildren steal my heart. I don't know if all grandpas are like that, but that's the way I feel. (*laughter*)

HH: Well, thank you.