

May 1, 2013

Home of Sherry Kawecki, DePeyster, NY

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

Interviewer: Hannah Harvester (HH),

Interviewees: Sherry Kawecki (SK)

Transcribed by: Christian Beekman

Note: This interview took place in the Kaweckis' barn. Sherry and I stood watching a newborn bull calf and his mother. The sounds of the barn may be heard on the recording. The recording starts shortly after Sherry began telling me her story of farming. HH

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SK: It was starting to change then, because my husband worked on a big farm, right before we got cows.

HH: So if you—I mean we can just—We can just talk right here if that works for you.

SK: Sure.

HH: Okay. So, let me just—I 'm going to say something into the recorder just to make it official.

SK: Okay.

HH: This is May 1st, 2013. My name is Hannah Harvester. I'm with TAUNY; Traditional Arts in Upstate New York. And would you say your name?

SK: Sherry Kawecki.

HH: Kawecki. We're here on her farm in...

SK: DePeyster.

HH: DePeyster. And we're gonna talk a little bit—Would you start by telling me a little bit about how you—how you got into farming and what brought you and your husband into dairy farming?

SK: Sure. We started our own farm in 1979, but before that I was at the University of Connecticut in my freshman year, and I decided I wanted to learn how to milk cows. I was a—I was trying to be a pre-vet student and I needed to have large animal experience. Which I had in horses—I'd worked with a vet with horses, but I wanted to learn about dairy cows. So, I had a student labor grant, so I worked in a dairy barn. The herdsman didn't want to train me how to milk because he didn't think women should be working in the barns. So, my husband-to-be volunteered to train me how to milk, and that's how I met him. And he didn't work there very long; he ended up leaving and going off to work on a post-and-beam place. But we kept in contact for a couple years, and then got married while I was still in college. But he

was working at a post-and-beam crew and then he came back to Connecticut and got a job on a large dairy that milked around four-hundred-seventy-five that was near where I was going to school. And he got to work about three in the morning, and got out about seven at night, and he had an hour or two for lunch. And he got Tuesdays off, but I had class 'til six on Tuesdays, so I didn't see him very much.

(laughs) And, he didn't like working there very much. It was hard to really know the cows. You just came in the parlor, you didn't see much, except their legs. And, that wasn't how we wanted to farm. But those cows actually still were going out to pasture, and they ate long hay—they baled hay on the ground, and crews of men picked the hay up and put it on big trucks; it was crazy, they milked that many cows. And also, I worked on a farm that milked a hundred-and-fifty Holsteins in a double-six parlor. And their cows went out into a big lot, too. And so, the cows, even on the big farms, were still going outside at the point. It's kind of a new thing that the cows have been kept inside so much.

0:03:17

HH: Did neither you, nor your husband—grew up on a farm? Is that right?

SK: No, neither of us did. My husband apprenticed at a farm in Minnesota before he went to college because he was also thinking to be a pre-vet student; he went to UVM. And so, when he went to Minnesota, it was a really good farm; the guy was one of the top Holstein breeders in the state, and he was very progressive and interested in what he was doing; he loved cattle. My husband's job, one of his first jobs, was to brush the cows before each milking, and the cows were kept scrupulously clean. He was a really good farmer, and he grew all his green and all his forage. And he raised two thousand pigs also. My husband had to clean up after the pigs and he learned how to drive a tractor, and just the routine, the daily routine working with animals; he fell in love with it, and he knew right then that he wasn't going to be a vet; he was going to be a farmer, but his parents were not going to be too thrilled about it. He worked on a Jersey farm while he was in college, which we had—later on we did rent there too, but, the he decided he was going to have Jerseys. And so when I met him he was determined that he was going to be a farmer, but he just didn't want to start farming when he was single. And so, he was going to keep doing other things until then, but then we met. I think we decided that what—I never thought I'd be a dairy farmer because when I was a kid I couldn't stand cows. But when I started working with them and actually having our own herds I just—the most wonderful animals to be around. I couldn't believe it; it's like an idyllic life to be around animals all the time, I love them. We've got our own herd of eighteen cows we bought around—they were mostly on small farms around White River Junction, Vermont; and they—I think they were from six different herds, and we brought 'em together. We rented a farm in Old Lyme, Connecticut that didn't have much land. It had a little barn and—it had some hay buck in it. We were going to be a purchase-feed farm, which is a—it was a new idea then, so you didn't have to buy all your equipment, it was supposed to be so great because you could just go and get the best feed and all of that, supposedly, if you could find it and not get cheated.

0:05:45

HH: Tell me, when was this, that you were starting—that you started renting this farm and got your herd?

SK: 1979. Our cows arrived in December '79, so it was right around—it was right when Ronald Reagan got elected (*laughs*). And dairy was doing pretty good until then, and then they got rid of the CCC and of all that stuff, and milk prices started to fluctuate wildly. And—

HH: What is the CCC?

SK: It was the Commodity Credit Corporation, which would buy up extra surplus, so it would keep the prices more stable at the farm—it was part of the New Deal that Roosevelt started. But it was a compromise, because really parity pricing was what farmers wanted at the time. And then they finally got rid of the CCC also, so now we're on this crazy system where the price fluctuates. It can fluctuate ten dollars in a few months, which is what kills everybody. And it makes people have to go to the bank to cover their expenses, because you can't, you know, come up with that kind of money in just a short period of time. And it's been like that pretty much the whole time we were in farming. Organic dairy farming isn't the same because you sign a contract and get a base price so it stays the same all the time. And that's a big advantage, as far as pricing goes. For us, we were beginning to be organic before there was even an organic market, because we saw that antibiotics weren't working and we wanted to know how else you could treat cow; and I admit, Ann Lazor, who—her and her husband have Butterworks farm in Vermont, and they have an organic yogurt place, and they were organic and there wasn't really much organic dairy yet. And she had mentioned homeopathics, and I had heard the word but I didn't know what it was. I went to the library and got a book, and started using it on my children, and we had—the first cow I ever used it on was interesting because I didn't know what was wrong with her; she was laying there, she wouldn't get up but had no specific other symptoms. She was outside; it was early spring, and she was just like depressed, or something. And so, I just looked up those symptoms under the—in the Homeopathic Materia Medica. And I found a medicine, and got it at the health food store and gave it to her.

0:08:08

HH: So you were looking it up in a book that was for humans, or?

SK: Yeah.

HH: Huh.

SK: And gave her that, and she got up, and she was fine. So I said, "Woah, this is pretty good stuff," so— (*laughs*) little tiny pills—

HH: Those little white pills? Yeah we took those when we were kids too, which was early eighties.

SK: Yeah.

HH: My mom was doing the homeopathic thing.

SK: Yeah, it was so amazing to see that they had worked on a gigantic animal—

HH: Did you give the same dosage?

SK: Yeah, yeah.

HH: Huh.

SK: Pretty much, yes. 'Cause it's not anything to do with volume of medicine. I didn't understand how it worked at all, but it worked.

HH: So do you still use that today? Those little pills?

SK: Yeah. That's the main thing we do. And the main thing they get now is injuries. You know, they fall down, or they hurt each other somehow, or even calving or whatever. So a lot of the time it's just arnica or aconite; the main things that I use. But I've tried things on pneumonia but I haven't had a whole lot of luck with that; there's a lot of remedies, and I guess I haven't quite nailed the exact one. That's the trouble.

HH: Can you, kind of pick up your story from when you started your herd and you were renting that farm in Connecticut and talk about—

SK: What happened next?

HH: What happened, yeah?

SK: Yeah.

0:09:40

HH: So talk about—you were saying that was '79-'80.

SK: Yup. So we were there about a year, and we decided we wanted to get some more cows, and a few other pieces of machinery, 'cause we didn't own our own tractor yet or anything, and the landlord did have a little bit of land we could use, and so we thought we could make some of our hay. So we got an equipment loan at a local dealer for a rake, and we borrowed a bailer, but he wanted to get his own tractor. So we borrowed money from the farm credit in Connecticut. Usually they didn't lend money to small people like us, and he told us that but he made an exception and lent us the money to get these cows. And we got 'em from a guy in Massachusetts who was a well-known farmer, and the Cattle Club was actually promoting it, so we thought it would be a good idea. But we went to look at the cows and it was a January, freezing cold—it was like a record cold, I don't know why we did it that way. But we went to look at 'em, and their water [...] had frozen so the cows really didn't look so good. But he let us look at the records and he said that, you know—we wanted to get higher butterfat-testing cows 'cause the first bunch we got were really good cows, but they didn't test so great; they were in the low fours, the middle fours and stuff. So we wanted to get some higher-butterfat, and he had some ones that had good records. So we looked at the records more than the cows, and we chose to get twelve of them, and they were delivered, and they were a mess. They were just—he said they were going to calf and they weren't even bred, and then the ones he said weren't bred would start to calf, and there was mastitis before that. And the mastitis was so bad we couldn't use the milk, and it was just a mess. A lot

of their feet were really long, and they just weren't very nice looking. When they were underfed and stuff like that, so, that was a disaster. So we called the Cattle Club about it, and they said it must be our fault and all this stuff. Anyway, it was a big deal having all these cows that were like, invalids. Obviously that lactation was—they weren't gonna do anything. We had to keep 'em around but we weren't gonna get any milk out of 'em. And, plus now we had a loan to pay. So the guy that sold 'em to us, we complained to him, too. And he came down, and he apologized. He seemed like a nice guy. He looked like an old farmer; he drove an old rattley pickup truck and wore a flannel shirt, and had grey hairs. And we thought, you know, maybe he's an old farmer; it wouldn't be bad to be around somebody with experience in all this. He offered us his mother's old tie-stall barn rent-free for a year plus a house, which we were having trouble with housing. We had to live in a tent, 'cause there wasn't any house with this farm. And we lived in his grandfather's unheated cottage and we rented all over the place, but we were having a hard time affording paying the house rent, because it was in a touristy area. It was like, six-hundred dollars a month for rent, and it was hard to—plus driving to the barn from wherever was difficult. So, that seemed like a good idea, until we got there. And then we saw the guy—the guy was an alcoholic. He drank a fifth of vodka or gin at six o'clock in the morning he was just out to lunch most of the time. He had been in the hospital and he told us he was in there for wrist surgery, but I guess it was a joke because, you know...*(laughs)* we didn't know! So we get there, and he has a rotary parlor, you know those ones that go around, and our cows were supposed to be separated. The trucker got there and we were still having to load other animals. And he said when our cattle got there they would be separated by gates, and when I got there with my parents, one of our heifers was swimming around in the manure pit. So I was freaking out, and so we got the heifer out of there, and nobody died or anything, yet. But we had a lot of trouble. They got hurt in the parlor, and he didn't know how to milk or anything. I mean, the guy was milking, but he would just—he wouldn't really prep them. He'd put the machine on, they didn't let their milk down, they'd get to the end, he'd let them out; they weren't milked! I just didn't know what to do; they were stressed out from the trucking, and he wasn't really milking them. My brother was like—he was like fourteen at the time—was helping me get the cows in, and my husband was still trucking calves and whatever. He didn't get there until like, two in the morning, so...

HH: You pretty much, like—were you pretty fresh out of college at that time? I mean, were you in your early twenties or—

0:14:47

SK: I wasn't even out yet. Yeah, I was twenty when we got married and got the cows; I had another year left. And, I was gonna just quit, I had eleven more credits. But this guy, my advisor, said "You could just do independent study with your animals, and that would be fine." So I did that. So I was just going to do projects and send them in, but, this whole thing was such a crazy disaster we were just up twenty-four hours a day with all the stuff going on. It was just nuts.

HH: So how did you get out of the situation?

SK: (*Laughs*) It took us a long time, we were there for a year and a half. But, he ended up selling his cows three months later because we did cause him some trouble. We just wouldn't let him milk the cows 'cause we didn't like how he milked. So he had a hundred-and-eighty and we had thirty, but we milked all of them. So we would just not let him in the parlor. We didn't let him doing anything with the animals. He would try to get us back. Like, on Sundays, like if my parents came, we're having a dinner; he'd see the cars there. So he would open all the gates and let all the cows loose just to be aggravating. So we'd have to chase two hundred and something head around to get 'em back in. Luckily it's up in a mountain where there's nobody else, really. It's on a dirt road so it wasn't really dangerous, but it wasn't a lot of fun to chase them all over the place, either. So we had a lot of fun with him (*laughs*). And of course, none of our relatives believed it because it was so bizarre, why would he do this? We didn't really know either; he said he would breed our cows for free, and I thought, "Hmmm, that sounds a little suspicious," but I said "Ok, you can do it once, but if they come back in heat again, I'm gonna call the breeder." And that's what happened; one of them came in heat again, I called the breeder, and the breeder told us the big stories. And we knew what was going on. We had never checked out anything before, and we should have, but being foolish and just believing somebody. Of course, it was too good to be true, you know. But, we had filed our lease with the town, right when we got it, because we knew—we had a lease with the first place, and we had a lease with him, we made him write a lease before we moved. So he had all in there that it was rent free for a year, and we had a three year lease, and everything was written; what we had use of and things like that. So, he couldn't play too many funny games. So that was filed, and—so, we ended up in court a few times. One time it was because he told his lawyer that we weren't paying rent, but we had a lease agreement that said that we didn't have to pay rent. So, he didn't tell the lawyer the truth. And so, we end up in court, and we didn't know what was gonna happen, but he ended up—when he got sworn in he told the truth! His lawyer was so mad! (*laughs*) So, you know, the lawyers had obviously—"You're not getting along, so something else has to happen." And we said "Yes, we want to leave, but we have to be able to leave—We have to move the cows," and we had just had the baby, too. "So we need time to find something, that's all" So they said "How long?" We said, "A year." We hoped it wouldn't take that long, but you never know. And we would have trouble because we couldn't use him as a reference obviously, 'cause we were not getting along. That was hard. We looked all over the place, and they always wanted to know where you were, and who it was, and all that. But then his old landlord sold the cows, I mean his [Sherry's husband's] old boss sold the cows, in Hinesburg, Vermont where he worked when he was at UVM. And she needed somebody to be there, and so we ended up moving there. So that worked out.

0:18:41

HH: You husband—so that was your husband's old boss.

SK: Old employer, yeah.

HH: Okay.

SK: So that was a nice farm. We were there for two and half years. And our second child was born there. And then—

HH: So did you—did you bring your cows with you?

SK: Yes, we moved our cows all the time.

HH: Okay.

SK: And then, she wanted to sell the place, but she didn't really offer it to us. But there was a big farmer nearby who wanted it, 'cause it would kind of adjoin his. And so, she was making deals with him, which we were kind of wondering, 'cause he would come around there, but she didn't tell us about it. And then she sprung it on us that the farm has been sold, so you have to leave. And we said "Well, we need time. We have to find something." And we were just sick of landlords by now. So we wanted to buy our own place but we didn't really have much money. So we found a place, we didn't think we'd be able to find anything in Vermont, because everything's so expensive. We did look in New York, but we really didn't find anything, 'cause even in New York—we looked down in the Mohawk Valley mostly, and most of the farms that were the size we wanted had already sold off some of the land; they were all short of land, you know, or the buildings were really bad, or something. And we found a place in Alburgh, Vermont, which is right near the Canadian border and the Champlain Islands. And for fifty-seven-thousand dollars. And, we had to come up with a twelve-thousand dollar down payment, which was not easy. We all had some adventures with that too, 'cause we advertised our Heifers and stuff all over the *Hoard's Dairyman*, so it went national and all that stuff. We had a guy from New Hampshire come and he said that he really didn't want heifers, but, if he got pick of the cows he would buy some and he said I could set the price. So he picked out, I don't know, probably ten or something. And I said nine-seventy-five, which wasn't a bad price, and he said "Sure, fine." And so my husband and I would switch off doing chores and he stayed in with the kids sometimes and I would, and it was a weekend, and I was—I was late, it was like ten o'clock in the morning; I was still milking. And fooling around with a, whatever, I just dawdled around. And his wife and he come in, and his wife was not impressed, you know; still milking, and things weren't done. She was not friendly at all. And so, this is like two weeks before closing, he—she calls up and she says—'cause they got out of me why we needed the money, and I said "We bought a place and needed a down payment, and closing is April 22nd, and we need it." And so she calls up and says "I'll give you three-twenty-five, take it or leave it." I said "Go to hell!" and I hung up the phone! I just was—then I thought, "Oh no! Now I have to tell my husband!" (*laughs*)

0:21:56

HH: Seems like you had a lot of struggles in your early years.

SK: Yeah.

HH: People weren't treating you very well. But you stuck—I mean, you really wanted to be dairy farmers, or you really wanted that life—

SK: Yeah.

HH: So you stuck with it.

SK: Yeah. There were some things we knew—I think it's the ideal way to raise a family, and really helped our marriage because we had to work together so much, and we really depend on each other and trust each other. And we had to work through a lot of things, but it's really worth it because I think we have a really good relationship, and we really can communicate with each other. And we're not the same, you know, but we'll give each other space. And so, I think life is a funny adventure, and at first I didn't know why we were going through all these things and I thought it was really bad, but as I've thought about it later, I thought it was to make us grow, because we were spoiled brat suburbanites who had it kind of easy. And I think the world was saying "Are you committed or not?" And we had to decide that. I mean we could've split up, we could've just given up, we could've done a lot of things, but we had to grow into it and grow up, 'cause in a lot of times in our society a lot of people don't grow up and we weren't going to 'cause we were spoiled brats, and hadn't worked. I mean, I was lazy; I just didn't like working when I was a kid. And, I had to push myself a lot, and so, if you want something you can do it. I think it was to teach us things. And it was good. *(laughs)*

0:23:42

HH: So even at that time, you knew that part of what you wanted was to raise a family on a farm?

SK: Yes, I always wanted a large family. Since getting the herd, I did. And I'd love the cows like they were my own family. I couldn't think of life without having a herd of cows. So, that's all I cared about. Nothing else. I didn't care if we had nothing as long as we had that. And so, we had that farm, but it was only sixty acres, so, but there was land around there then. So we could rent, or use it. People would let you use it, because they were trying to sell it and it wouldn't sell. 'Cause it's so far north; people were just not going far north of Burlington to buy land yet, but that changed towards the end. 'Cause we were there fifteen years and my grandmother had got Alzheimer's in ninety—it was the Ice Storm, so it must have been '98. She came and stayed with us that year. And my youngest was two, and it must of been '97 or something. Anyway she—I was really close to my grandmother. She grew up on a farm, and she always told stories about it. Her father had a peach orchard and raised onions to sell. Those were there two crops, down in Connecticut. They also had a shop that made oxen bows and barrel hoops and some other thing for ships that used to hold the masts together— mast tubes. Their shop supposedly was at Sturbridge Village.

SK: They—she lived through the Depression, and she always had stories, but they always had enough food; and she had respect for farming, but she did want to get out of it. But she ended up coming and staying with us at the end. She left some money to us and we decided, "Well, maybe we'll try to buy some land." So, — 'cause we were getting kind of boxed in. Everyone was putting in perk tests and driveways in all the land we were using, and sometimes you didn't know if you could rent any of it, until July, 'cause they wanted know if you were going to sell it or not, and then they'd want you cut it.

0:26:18

HH: Sorry, what's a perk test?

SK: It's to see if you can put a septic tank in.

HH: Oh.

SK: You know, they put in like a pipe or something to see if the water sits or not.

HH: Okay.

SK: So, it was getting to land. So we looked into buying some land around, and the price, we were just shocked, 'cause prices had gone up to eight thousand an acre! And so we thought, "Oh, well, I guess we can't really afford to live here." So we started looking at ads, and we found this area, and ended buying a farm here.

HH: What year was that?

SK: It was the end of '99; it was really 2000, we got here two days before Christmas in '99.

HH: Okay. And just, quickly, how did you manage to pay your down payment on that Vermont farm?

SK: Well, we—the landlord ended up deciding she wanted to graze some heifers, she didn't want it to be— 'cause she had two pieces of land, and where her house was she wasn't going to sell. And she didn't want to have no animals to graze it. Because she saw this activity, and she was afraid she wouldn't have anything. We had remained calm even though everything was going nuts, and so we said "Well, maybe we have some left." We're going "Thank God!" (*laughs*) And she bought some, and then another guy bought a couple—two or three bred heifers. And then we sold a little bit of equipment, and then my grandmother gave us a little bit, and then his mother gave us the last bit. So we pulled it together, and it was like the day before, and— (*laughs*)

HH: Wow.

SK: —we got it!

HH: Okay. So you came here in the end of '99. You bought your—

SK: Cows.

HH: Jerseys. So these—you always had Jerseys.

SK: Yeah, these were the same herd we always had.

0:28:22

HH: And what size herd did you have at that time?

SK: It was pretty much the same; I think we had around forty milking cows and we always maintained around ninety-five or a hundred altogether. In Hinesburg we milked a little bit more because there was more stalls, so we could milk a few more cows. So, you know, we were able to sell a big group. I think we might have tried to sell like twenty, actually, when we were moving that time, because we had so many more than we really planned on milking at the new place. But we never really were enthralled with the

getting big thing. Our cows all have names, and that's how we wanted to do it. We saw these little farms where we bought the cows originally, and that's—but they were all older people, some of them in their sixties and seventies, that were milking small herds and nice cows, but that's how we were. We wanted to bed 'em up with two feet of hay, and that's how I think I feel wealthy is when I can bed my cows like that, and there's plenty of feed, and there's, you know. That's what I like. I just don't—I think what happens too, is these big farms, for what I can see, are run by people who, you know, like machinery. I don't like machinery. We have what we have, but my husband, he likes stuff to work, but he doesn't care if it's new. He's not so—he's not a machinery nut. He really isn't, and that's helped. And, we had the same tractor for—we had one tractor for probably twenty-five years, and that's all we had, a fifty-four horse-power tractor. We found a round-baler that worked on that, and there's only basically one kind that makes a decent sized round baler that works on such a small tractor. But that's all. And so, he did all the field work, and the kids just mainly stayed and helped me with the cows and stuff. They didn't really drive a tractor until we got here, and then they all, the boys started to do more with that.

0:30:32

HH: How many children do you have?

SK: We have five children. Ranging in age from thirty to seventeen.

HH: Okay.

SK: We have our first grandchild, who was born in February.

HH: Oh, wow!

SK: Two of them are married, our oldest daughter, and our youngest son. And we have a daughter who's a eurhythmy teacher.

HH: Eurhythmics?

SK: Eurhythmy.

HH: Oh, eurhythmy.

SK: Yes.

HH: Is that—but that is eurhythmics?

SK: It's a movement art that Rudolf Steiner gave.

HH: Yeah, I have heard of eurhythmics. I never heard eurhythmy. But yeah.

SK: And so, we actually have four of our children. Two of them are still in school to be eurhythmists, and my oldest daughter is too, but she has a child. Her husband also went to eurhythmy school. So, my middle daughter is a eurhythmy teacher and my oldest son is at eurhythmy school. He's twenty-nine, and he also—he's artistic, he's making wooden spoons, he's blacksmithing and things like that. Then my

youngest son works here, he's married, he's just been married maybe almost two years. And my youngest daughter's seventeen, and she's at eurhythmy school.

HH: And you said one of your children is working on the farm with, I forget if it was your son or your daughter?

SK: It's a son.

HH: Okay. Is that the oldest?

SK: No, he's the youngest son.

HH: Oh, okay.

SK: He's twenty-three.

HH: And it's him and his wife.

SK: Yeah. Well, she doesn't work here so much yet, but, hopefully—we're trying to start a cheese business.

HH: Right, right.

SK: And so then, there will be some things for her to do.

0:32:38

HH: So you said you had been conventional, and you became organic? Can you talk about that a little bit? When did that happen? And what it was like making that shift, and why did you make that choice?

SK: Well, one of the things that happened, we had a really high grain bill. And, we couldn't pay it. Because the ration that the nutritionist came up with was high in canola and canola, especially for Jerseys at a certain level and probably even for Holsteins, but Jerseys are affected more for some reason, was toxic. And they were having all kinds of health problems and the calves were stunted, and they had big potbellies, and they'd scour, and all kinds of rotten things were going on. But they kept—we talked to the grain company and they'd say it was your forage and all this stuff but we didn't—they always do that. Whenever your animals are sick you always get blamed no matter what. And so, we didn't know, 'cause you figure they know, but then we started to see articles coming out in the farm papers about the canola and that there were – and it does, it has erucic acid in it, and they had to actually try to change that, 'cause they make canola oil out of it for human consumption, and that's toxic. It's naturally in rapeseed, this canola, but that doesn't sound so nice, so they call it canola 'cause it's Canadian. So, we tried to do something about the grain bill. I tried to talk to the guy about reducing it, and he wouldn't. So, then we tried to go to court, and the judge threw us out because she said we had to have a lawyer, and so we went to Minor Institute and tried to find out from them if there was somebody that would testify. And they guy was real nice, and he said, you know, "You have to have a

hired professional witness,” and they start at thirty-five thousand, and so we knew—he said “You probably can’t do it.”

HH: And when was all this?

00:34:39

SK: I don’t remember the year. It must have been in the eighties, some time. Late eighties, early nineties. And so, we ended up borrowing the money from Walt’s parents. We had to go crawling to the relatives and feel like garbage as usual. And so, that was a disaster, but we didn’t want to get into that again. So we stopped feeding so much grain. I said “Whatever we can afford, that’s all they get.” And that was hard for my husband, ‘cause, you know—we were kind of—we went to university; we were trained a certain way, and grain feeding is what you do. We were afraid we’d go broke if we didn’t feed ‘em enough grain, you know? We were going broke ‘cause we were feeding them grain. But, we cut back on the grain, and they were so much healthier, really soon after that. We usually didn’t have a high cell count, ‘cause we’d keep the milk out if the cows were, you know, having bad milk or something. But there were cows that had to be kept out of the tank, but when we lowered the amount of grain they were getting, the mastitis pretty much disappeared. And mastitis is not a big problem. The only time they get it now is if they get an injury or something, they really don’t get mastitis very much. And, it was a big problem when we were conventional. I had a lot more trouble with calves, too. They would scour more often. Things like that. So, that was the beginning then; I didn’t know about homeopathics for a while. But antibiotics weren’t doing anything, it was just ridiculous. And then I had a veterinarian that told me that he didn’t think dry treatment was any good, and he didn’t recommend it. And we had been highly recommended to dry treat.

0:36:41

HH: What does that mean?

SK: Every time a cow dries off sixty days before they’re going to calve. When you dry them off, you’re supposed to put these tubes of medicine up in each teat—antibiotic. And it’s supposed to mean that, they won’t, you know, get mastitis. So, but the veterinarian that I had said he didn’t like it because they have a little waxy seal on the bottom of their teats that kinda keep the bacteria out. When you stuff those tubes in there, it ruins that seal and actually adds more trouble. I didn’t quite believe him because I was quite reliant on this. When I was in college—it was pretty new in the late seventies, so when I was in college dry treating was the thing, you know? They just talked about it all the time, and teat dipping and all this stuff; which they never did really much of before that. So, it was difficult to believe him. He said “I’d rather have you give him a shot than put those in there,” and I started to think about it, and I tried it. I had some cows, you know, drying off. They didn’t seem like they needed it, so I didn’t do it and hey, it worked! And dry treatment’s really expensive; it’s like fifty or sixty dollars a box, to treat—I think it’s twelve tubes. Three cows. So that’s pretty expensive. Conventionally, I think that we do it a hundred percent of the time. And for a lot people that are organic it’s a big hurdle to feel like “Oh, I don’t have to dry treat.” So, it’s kind of ingrained. But I went to a talk from an organic veterinarian from Wisconsin, Dr. Dettloff, and he said that he got out of vet school in the late seventies, so he was a big dry cow, dry

treating vet; 'cause he was supposed to promote it for these different companies, too. And you get kickbacks or whatever. But he was saying that, the farmers told him that after a few years of this stuff, they never saw e coli mastitis until dry treating came in. So, it must've suppressed the immune system enough so that the worst bacteria can come in and cause them to get really—e coli mastitis is a horrible disease. They don't die really fast, but they suffer for days. So usually you end up shooting them, because you can't watch it anymore. A lot of them don't get better; we had a couple of them get better but their quarters usually dry up and you're not milking them anymore. But it's a really gross thing because they just lay there and...it's no good. A lot of the things that are—this modern way of looking at things is when you see something, you do something, you want to see an instant result and that's how you evaluate; everything is very short-sighted, and when things happen, years or generations later, there's no notice taken and it's blamed on the wrong things. I think it's been frustrating for us, because we've tried to figure why we are creating a society that is so disgusting, you know, it hurts people. We're ruining our children's lives, we're creating obesity, and we're wrecking our land. Why can't we have something in these time when we say we're scientific, that is solving problems instead of creating more? And it's a big fat lie that GMOs and all these things are going to feed people, because actually they're lower yielding, and they're finding out that GMO soybeans are lower yielding, and they actually take more spray. And the cotton farmers tried to sue the—Monsanto for that, you know, twenty years ago. You can look any of this stuff up, but farmers just don't look up anything and they trust people too much. Maybe part of our background made us not trust everything; we finally learned that. But I've always been skeptical of mainstream stuff, anyway. And we ourselves tried to eat organic food since our first child was born. But I didn't really—I thought because, well, there's so many animals, you have a hundred head; of course some of them are going to get sick. And you think it's just the larger population, that's how I thought. But then I started to think, animals really, they don't get sick, they shouldn't be getting sick. And so I started to put it together, but there wasn't a lot of information, you really have to dig. And we finally found out about *Acres* magazine. And that's another problem, is farmers get free magazines in the mail; and they never really—it doesn't occur to them that when something is free somebody somewhere is getting something out of it, and it isn't them. And so they get *Farm Journal*, *Dairy Today* or *Dairy Herd Management*, and there might be more, and you don't have to pay for them. And they're all ads, and even the articles are ads; and they just don't realize. But, we started reading *Acres*, and that's a really good publication. When Charles Welters was alive—he was alive during when Roosevelt wrote the New Deal, so he knows about, he knew about all the economic things they've been doing to farmers ever since. Because it was purposeful; they want to get farmers off the land, in fact, and there's some kind of thing in this county where they only want sixty dairy farmers total, and the rest of us will be eliminated at some point.

00:42:09

HH: Is that—?

SK: It's a policy! It's like their ten-year-plans. It's like the—through the USDA—the Extension works through the USDA, and these things are administered through different methods; you know, the rollercoaster prices, through real estate issues, through taxation, through loan availability, whatever. They can control it, 'cause really now the banks control farming, 'cause you can only borrow money

from a couple places, and they're controlled by the government: Farm Credit is a government—basically a government bank too because they just do some kind of stock trading with the government, and they're not independent at all, so their policies have to do what the government wants. There isn't any way to get money, unless you do what they say. And they don't lend to farmers that don't want to expand. (pause) But, there's a lot of information you can get know—I bought a book to the talk where I met you, *The Untold Story of Milk* by Ron Schmidt, and that is an excellent book, goes through the history of milk production, and why we have pasteurized milk, which is political, and laziness, and anti-consumer. And we traded off infant mortality for now chronic diseases, and there's proof that pasteurized milk, homogenized milk causes some of these chronic diseases that we now have in our society; heart disease, cancer, all kinds of problems that are now the result of that. And another thing, our economy is ruined, because there's not enough farmers. A rural community that has thirty healthy farms, those milk checks get deposited in the local bank, and that money is kept in the area. And now, with ruining agriculture, the towns are all poor. So, rural America is poor, and you see now, a lot of the kids are getting decrepit, where they used to be more robust people, and healthy and they were outside. Now, they're just as decrepit looking as the inner-city kids. And, that's the ravaging of the agricultural aspect of the community. And then they do their thing where you, you know, *Hee-Haw* and all the shows where they make fun of farming, like you have to be really stupid to do it, when you really have to know a lot of things to be a farmer. You have to know about taking care of land and animals and fixing everything: plumbing, carpentry, electricity, repairing all sorts of equipment, raising a wide variety of crops... so it's a varied and interesting life, and I think it's worth it. There's long hours, but we have time in the middle of the day. We have, you know—busy in the morning, and then in the evening. But a lot of times we can take time in the middle of the day, and do things. And with our kids, they did—they always had animals; my oldest daughter had sheep which I still have, and then my middle daughter had goats, and they had—all of 'em had horses. So they—they have a rich life with all the—and they took 'em to the fairs, and the boys of course liked the equipment part. And they liked to tinker with things. When we read *Farmer Boy*, our young son wanted to—he really liked that book, so we tried planting carrots for the animals, and we grew some corn and handpicked it, and just, you know, whatever they came up with. It was an adventure for us, too; 'cause we knew we didn't know anything (laughs), we could try new things all the time. And we're biodynamic, which is another thing my husband found when we were in Vermont and took me a while to get into it, but that's the oldest organic farming method from Germany, and Rudolf Steiner was a person that brought a lot of things to modern culture; even back in the nineteen twenties, things were falling apart. Human beings were starting needless wars with each other, propaganda was thick, and people weren't thinking, they weren't paying attention, and things haven't changed much. And he gave indications for education that will help children, and he gave eurhythmy, he gave—one of the last things was agriculture, 'cause he realized without food you didn't have any vitality and that none of the other things that keep you going could be carried out. And that's one of the things that's missing, well it is the main thing missing from commercial food; it's not alive. From the time they start spraying dead—killing things all over the fields, to over processing, overheating, storage that's too long, transporting everywhere. Food is dead when you get it, which probably takes more out of a person to digest it than you get out of the food itself, so it's mining you when you eat it. That's probably what those degenerative diseases are all about. So, we wanted to do something that was positive, because also, you know, we were affected by growing up when Vietnam War was on;

seeing *Life* magazine full page pictures of the slaughter at My Lai and all those things. Just seeing that, when you're a child and you didn't want to be a part of that. And I was really proud of people that tried to stop that war, but, you know, the drug culture kind of took over that and made everyone into an idiot. But we didn't want to be part of corporate stuff, but what could we do, and farming seemed like a positive thing. And then, you know, you find out that you're following a lot of the corporate path anyway. That wasn't what we wanted, so then we found biodynamics, and we didn't want to be organic by *not* doing something, we wanted to be organic by actually taking something and being active in it, and biodynamics requires you to study and think about how to use the preparations, and it's a lifelong study. So, that's what my husband and I do, a lot, too is study together. We study a lot of Rudolf Steiner's works and other people that were influenced by him and doing things in agriculture, and try to study and try to be better farmers., and continue to learn.

00:49:37

HH: Can you describe, briefly, what it means to be a biodynamic farm?

SK: You use preparations; horn manure is the most important one you start with, which are cow horns filled with manure; you do that in the fall. And then you bury them over the winter, so that the crystallizing forces of the earth change the manure, and then you dig it up in the spring, and you save it in crocks, in your basement or somewhere where it's cool and damp. And then you take about a third of a cup per five acres I think it is, or maybe an acre. And you stir it for an hour, and we have a stirring machine I can show you. And we do about fifty-five gallons at a time, and spray about thirteen acres. It's stirred a certain way so you make a big vortex, so it's chaos into order. You start to see that's how agriculture is too, because when you plant a seed, it goes into chaos first. And then the plant comes into order. It's all like that in life; it's the cycle of nature. So, that's what you learn when you're working with that. Then there's the—that one's a soil preparation, and that helps build humus. We took a little trip and visited a few farms that have been using it, and one guy has been using for, I don't know, thirty years maybe? And he has sandy soil, and he says that you can build topsoil, like feet, in decades instead of millennia like they always talk about. It really works. Then the other one, for the plants is horn silica, which you need a lot less of that. And that's buried in the spring, for the summer. You take ground up quartz crystal and fill, like the size farm we have, three hundred acres, just takes two horns.

00:51:39

HH: So, I'm a little confused. Are they your cows' horns?

SK: We bought horns.

HH: Ah, okay.

SK: If they do die, or we slaughter them, we save the horns, but we did buy our horns—

HH: Okay.

SK: Because we didn't have them. But the reason why they have horns, why we keep them on is because he talks about—the reason cows have horns is not for defense, it's actually taking in forces, spores, for their digestion, and it helps them digest. That's why there's so many blood vessels in their horn. They have a lot of blood vessels in their feet, too, because they have contact with the earth, they're very earthly animals. And that contact helps them digest, which is another thing if they're on cement all the time. It's not good, and when they're dehorned which also—the other thing is it makes 'em a lot more passive to have horns. And they are more social and alert when they have horns. They're not as dull. So, it helps them wake up, but that gives you responsibility too because you have to treat em right, because if they are awake, they're going to notice more and feel more. You have responsibilities, whereas if you dull them, they don't take it all in and it just kind of passes them.

HH: So you've been researching these methods, you know, since before you technically became organic? Is that right? And trying to incorporate some these methods—but then there was a certain point when it was – you had sort of this dawning realization about antibiotics, and then—

SK: That was before, that was the first thing, antibiotics.

HH: Oh, okay. Okay. So when did you, like, technically become—you have to become certified organic, and then it's a different system of—

SK: Yeah, we had to—for three years we were organic, and then we could be biodynamic. 'Cause they wanna make sure that you really know how to use the preparations and everything.

HH: Okay.

SK: So we moved here, this farm was conventional. And that field across the road was in corn for about ten years. So, we had to transition for three years. We couldn't be organic at first, so we had three years, and then we had another two or three years before we could be biodynamic.

HH: Okay.

SK: So, it was a long process.

00:54:09

HH; Can you talk a little bit about just how getting your milk to market works for organic because you were saying that the pricing structure is a little bit different?

SK: Yes. They just contract with the trucker. All the organic milk goes on the truck, but they just hire—they work with Dairylea or DMS, Dairy Marketing Services, which they had to create because of their, you know, they were gonna get in trouble for anti-trust, because there was too many—you know, not enough buyers. So they created this thing which I don't know what it does. Anyway, that's who writes the checks, they arrange the trucking. So, it's still through a co-op. So, basically they're just an office that, you know, calls up people to sell and buy and whatever, but we have a contract with them. But all

farmers have a contract with somebody whoever it is, a co-op or whatever. Ours is through DMS and then Horizon.

HH: Okay. It sounded, when I—at your talk the other day it sounded like you weren't necessarily totally enchanted with organic milk, either, because it still has to be pasteurized and this and that, so—

SK: Actually, now organic, the way it works, it would be perfect for certified raw milk because we have to go through—our animals have to be outside, they have to be fed a certain way. We do a lot of paperwork and we get inspected, and that would really be good to start, you know, a certified raw milk; it's perfect to begin that. And that's really the ideal, because what is the point of going to all this trouble and keeping your animals a certain way if they're going to boil it half to death? But it does give them flexibility in shipping because they usually ultra-pasteurize it so it doesn't have to be refrigerated so they can have it for years. That doesn't do a farmer any good either, they need to move things, and they don't have milk sitting around if. If it's not going to be sold, it's just silly to keep it around. It should be made into a better product than that. If you're going to sit it around, why not make cheddar cheese or something, and you can age it, and it's still good. It doesn't make sense to UHT liquid milk to me. I just think it's silly, if not rotten, to do that to people. And then it's over sugared, and flavored, and I just don't get too thrilled about that.

00:56:56

HH: And you said you were talking about starting a cheese making operation here?

SK: Yes, we are pretty close to it. We have an inspection; we have a few things we still have to do.

HH: You actually have the equipment here and everything?

SK: Yes.

HH: Oh. Okay.

SK: So, we plan on making hard cheese. We want to make raw milk cheese that's aged sixty days. But I don't know how we're going to start. We might start with pasteurized cheese so we can sell something before the sixty days, but we're still kind of discussing.

HH: So there are stricter requirements for raw milk cheese? Is that—

SK: Yeah, you're not allowed to sell it before sixty days; that eliminates a lot of varieties you can't sell.

HH: Is your idea with the cheese to use all your milk eventually for that operation, or—

SK: Well, it would be nice. I'm not sure, we have to see—because marketing is a whole new thing for us, we never did that. So, we'll see. But it's an artistic thing too, taking care of cheese. My husband and I have always been interested in it. We've made cheese in the house a lot and he's very excited about it. He really wants to make cheddar, which of course, the best cheddar is pretty old so it's not like you're going to make a lot of money with it at first. Because you have to wait.

HH: Right, right.

SK: But, that to us is interesting, because a lot of the cheese now is made in those CheddarMasters and it's all rubbery and it doesn't taste very good, I don't think. So, we want to make cheese that we like, 'cause you can't really get it.

HH: Do you—have you always made a lot of dairy products at home for the family, or is that new?

SK: No, we've made yogurt for a long time. And we—you know, whipped cream, and eat a lot of cream, and I've made camembert for a long time now. I like to make the bag cheeses where you hang them.

HH: Oh, yeah.

SK: I make French cream cheese or something like, yogurt cheese or stuff like that. And cottage cheese. I've made Gouda for a while, that one's not very hard to make in the house. I don't have much luck with cheddar 'cause it's always too cold or something; it can't get the stuff to knit, the curds never knit up the way they should.

00:59:44

HH: So, I have a lot more questions; we've been talking for over an hour, though.

SK: Oh, really?

HH: Yeah. So I wonder—I mean would it be possible for me to come back, like another day, and ask you some more questions. I mean, if you have the time, we can keep talking, but—like, I want to hear—there were some things that we were talking about before I started recording; just about the animal care, and the hoof trimming, just I don't know if—

SK: Like what about the hoof trimming?

HH: Well, you'd said you'd do it yourself and, just how you— I mean, I don't know, I have a lot of questions. So I don't know if it's okay to keep talking.

SK: Yeah, it's fine. My husband's not back yet, anyway.

HH: Okay. Okay, so how will I start...? Could you talk a little bit, just about caring for Jersey cows, because you have—you did have experience with Holsteins, right, when you were in college?

SK: Yeah. I think it's pretty much the same. It's just that they're smaller, so that's another thing we liked is that they don't require as much land, because since they're smaller—they eat a lot, though, for their size. But I think it takes less land, especially for pasture and for their size, they're efficient. People like the bigger numbers, but they've been proven to be more efficient than Holsteins in a lot of studies as far as their feed use and what you get out of it. 'Cause they make less volume, but their milk is not so watery, so you get—like, with a Holstein you only get ten percent cheese yield. With a Jersey, it can be like thirteen percent, which makes a lot of difference. There's places in California that pay premiums for Jersey milk because of that. You have a lot less to throw away, and it has a lot more flavor, because

there's just more in it. And for me, I figure if you want to drink water, why don't you drink water? Why do you have to run water through a cow, and then drink that? It doesn't make any sense.

01:02:05

HH: And you said your animals are pretty long-lived.

SK: Yup. I like to have them around because, a long time I get to know them, I don't know, I get attached to them I guess. And I just like to work with certain animals. Usually I like to sell them when they're young, if I don't really think they're so interesting, and around here it's kind of nice because I can sell mostly everything for dairy. Amish come in and want a family cow, we had some people that weren't Amish that came and got two family cows. And they don't want the high producers, and they want young cows, and so I can sell 'em. So I haven't had to send to many to—I try really hard never to send a cow to the auction anymore, 'cause they get abused; 'cause they have to go through the sale, and they have to get loaded on those big trucks, and then who knows who long they're on the trucks because the slaughterhouses are all closed. And they have to—and sometime's I've heard there've been times when the cows have to stay on the trucks and be lined up for like a day or something, just on the truck. To me, that's just unnecessary torture. For a hundred dollars, I'm not doing it. So, we sell some meat, and have 'em butchered, or, some friends came and butchered the last one, and somebody need meat so, they got it. Because we didn't; our freezers were full. But we tried—and then other thing, I sell 'em to Amish for beef, because some of them don't have beef, and I had two that I needed to sell for beef and they bought 'em. So I just sell 'em a little bit cheap, and they will butcher them. I had like three cows that were going be fourteen, and they were just, not gonna want to be in the barn that winter. So I sold—I went around the neighborhood and asked if anybody wanted beef, so I do it that way, and I don't have to ship. And that works out; I just try to juggle it so I don't end up with all of 'em being fifteen at the same time. (*laughs*) I have some new heifers coming in and whatever, I can keep some of them. Once they're eight or so I don't like to sell 'em, 'cause I figure that they are used to the place, and they're used to us, and it's too stressful for them to get used to some other place. So, I usually decide to keep them or butcher them after that. But, younger than that I figure they can get along, depending on the individual one.

01:04:45

HH: And you said they were easy calvers?

SK: Yup, they—their rump is a different shape than a Holstein. I don't know if you noticed how a Holstein has a really square rear end, and I think they bred 'em that way because they like the way they look. But a Jersey, their rump isn't so blocky, and when they—see how her tendons near her tail are so loose? They just open right up, and the calf just comes out. They look like they're small but they can have a good sized calf, easily, because they—I don't think they've been messed with genetically as much as the Holstein, because apparently articles I've read from the thirties and forties, even the Holstein was already starting to have problems because people were breeding them for huge cows and there's—and then I went to a Gerald Fry talk, which he's the guy that tries to teach you how to keep your own genetics and have a grazing herd that doesn't require grain. And he was saying that a cow's metabolism,

what did he call it, the... is it the adrenal system? It's to do with the glandular system of the cow, doesn't get bigger as the cow gets bigger. So a cow, even a Holstein, should be only like thirteen or fourteen-hundred pounds. Now they're going up to eighteen hundred and stuff. Their glandular system does not grow, doesn't get any bigger; so that's why they have trouble because it doesn't regulate their body system as well. And they just have all this body, they have huge bones, and huge body that they—it has to be administered by the same small system. So the Jersey has an advantage of being a little smaller, 'cause our cows average less than a thousand pounds. So, he said most bovines are not supposed to be bigger than thirteen-hundred pounds. Even Holsteins. And then another thing, Rudolf Steiner, I was really interested in what he had to say about cows, because he said that the honeybee would be gone in about a hundred years if we don't change, and the cow, he said shouldn't make more than forty-five pounds because if they make more milk than that, you're just taking away the vitality for humans beings to even want to eat it. So all this push for higher production all the time, it's extremely stressful, but you see, in the fields they do the same thing, you know. They're planting the corn closer together and everything is just greed all the time. The farmer's getting pushed 'cause they got to get the same amount of money they got twenty years ago for the same crop, so they're squeezing everything, they're squeezing the soil, and the plant, and the animal, and they're just—you know, we're going to pay, somehow. You just can't do that. There's no free lunch, and we have to pay attention to what we're doing. And it used to be that we were concerned for seven generations, and now suddenly we're concerned for five minutes. And what are our children going to inherit? There's nowhere to work, the earth is getting more and more polluted, we're not going to have air to breathe or clean water to drink or a nice trail to walk on, or anything if—it's not just about industrial, commercial interests; because most of us live every day and we're not always so much involved in thinking about all that nonsense, because some people and their small brains are the ones doing it. And we're letting the small brain people run us around. And it's about time the rest of us woke up and said "Enough of this nonsense!" We all want to have a life; we don't care about this stupid money stuff.

01:08:42

HH: I agree. (*laughs*)

SK: And the animals, they don't need to suffer with it, either.

HH: And I forget what—I already forget what you said the average Holstein—you said forty—

SK: Forty-two months.

HH: —two months.

SK: Well, I think that's all of, you know, the cows, averaged. When we started farming it was over six years old.

HH: Wow. Wow.

SK: Maybe seven. And they used to keep track of that on your, what they call the DHIA sheets. We used to be on test, where they come in and measure your milk. And you can get your butter fat test, and your

cell count and all that stuff. And it would say what your average age was. And to get it higher, we used to—you know, that used to be a bragging right. But now nobody cares.

HH: Hmm. That's really interesting. What is the feed for your cows? You don't feed them any grain or—

SK: No.

HH: Okay.

SK: Last year—last winter was the first time we didn't, because we grow a little bit of grain.

HH: Is that corn or...?

SK: We grow small grain. We grow spelt and oats, and we would like to grow barley. My husband wants to plant mangel beets, and carrots, and maybe potatoes, to feed some of that. Potatoes are supposed to be good for cows. And carrots and beets are good for young stock. So we were gonna try and do a couple rows of that, out in the field near the green. We'll see; he's thinking about it. But harvesting it and all that, I don't know how we'll do that. But usually we feed small grain, and this year we ran out because last year was dry and we didn't get that much. Plus, we didn't plant very much acreage; we're planting a little more this year. But grain went up to over seven hundred a ton, organic grain, and we couldn't afford it or justify that, so we had to stop. And they did fine until we ran out of balage in second cut, and then all they had is first cut, which is this stuff. This is second cut, which is—they like that, at least some of it, they probably wouldn't want it if it was all the time, either. But they like variety. They—oh that's another thing—

01:10:58

HH: This is hay—I mean this is just hay.

SK: This is just first cutting hay—

HH: Okay.

SK: —With the lighter stuff. This greener stuff is second cutting hay.

HH: What makes the second cutting more—is the second cutting more nutritious?

SK: Well the first cutting has more energy in it, sugar, because it's the early spring stuff. But, it grows really fast, and you know, the sun is brighter when you're drying it, it's in July or June or something. So it gets bleached out. The second the cut is when it's more protein, and that is usually in August or September when you do it. So that's why it, you know—it's shadier out, doesn't bleach out as much. But it's a second growth so it doesn't get as tall, so you get less of it.

HH: Okay.

SK: So, they like the variety. There was an old saying that “Cows should eat a hundred different plants a day.” And that’s another thing, though. There’s cows eating corn and soy beans, and maybe alfalfa if you’re lucky. That’s a lot less than a hundred. So...

HH: And of course, then they’re out to pasture, for much of the—

SK: For the whole time it’s nice out.

HH: And do you plant in the pastures, or is it just—

SK: It’s mostly their stuff. What they graze and what grows back. But no, I haven’t done a lot of what I was thinking of putting, like comfrey, out along the edges or something. ‘Cause I have comfrey up here but it’s a pain in the neck to give it to them, so I thought “What if I just put it along the edge and then if they want it, they can get it,” so—cause that’s why I decided to grow it the first place.

HH: That sound is coughing?

SK: No, they’re chewing

HH: Oh, okay. (*laughs*)

SK: They’re little brats. (*laughs*) They like to get into trouble. They don’t have enough to do.

HH: Now is this—do you have a second barn, or is this the—

SK: This is the barn.

HH: This is the barn. Okay. It smells so good. It doesn’t smell poopy like other barns (*laughs*). Is that because of the hay, like, the—

01:13:13

SK: Yes, it’s a lot of bedding. That’s why I like a lot of bedding, I think it should smell good, and I think cows are sensitive to smells. And the smells get in the milk, too.

HH: When does this barn date to?

SK: What?

HH: When does this barn date to?

SK: Oh this barn, this is fairly new. This one is probably in the nineties.

HH: Oh, really.

SK The middle barn is old, where those big beams are. And then our cheese room is in the other part which is new, too.

HH: Oh, okay.

SK: We built around it.

HH: And what is your manure—and what do you do with your manure, are you using liquid, or—

SK: No, it goes in that solid—it's a solid spreader, and we bring it out to a field where it going to be spread, but we don't spread our manure in the fall, we don't spread raw manure at all.

HH: Okay.

SK: So we make windrows that are raised up along the field, and then the biodynamic preparations are put into the compost piles, also. There's five of those, that are made out of various parts of the cow, and herbs. I make 'em in the fall, and they're pretty fun to make. Actually I just got my oak bark skull out of the water today, I can show you.

HH: Cool!

SK: *(laughs)*

HH: And how many acres do you have in production?

SK: We have three hundred altogether, and there's probably—there's sixty acres of woods. And—

HH: You said three hundred?

SK: Yeah.

HH: Okay.

SK: It's in three parts. it's not—this is about hundred and five acres on this side of the road and the other; it's almost evenly divide by the road. And then we have sixty seven down the road about two miles. And down on the other—on 184 we have another farm that's a hundred and forty acres.

HH: Okay. And between you and your husband and your son, what is the division of labor? Are you still the main animal care, and your husband is the crops, or is it more of a shared thing?

SK: Well, we're still trying to figure it out. He likes field work more; they milk on Tuesdays, but I milk the rest of the time. I milk most of the time, unless I'm not here. But it's a pipeline, it's easy to milk. And I like to milk. I'm no good with equipment at all; I never do field work. I used to a little bit when the kids were little, but now they do that. And I do some of the—I do all of the preparations for the newer piles; they do the spraying; Walt does most of the spraying. Unless we do hand spraying, which we do the—the horn silica is the one you do on the leaf of the plants. And when we do our grain crop, we don't like to drive over the grain with a tractor, so we hand spray all our grain, even if it's twenty acres.

01:16:11

HH: And when you say spray, you're talking about the biodynamic preparations.

SK: Right.

HH: You're not using—you don't use any—

SK: We don't use any chemicals.

HH: Wow.

SK: No. No chemical fertilizer. Only our composted manure and the biodynamic sprays.

HH: Now is that—if you're going to be a certified organic farm, is there an amount of chemicals you can use?

SK: No.

HH: There's no chemical in organic at all, okay.

SK: No chemicals. That's the thing that was, you know, it's not allowed. But that turned into how things are defined, and we didn't really like that, 'cause it's not just that you don't do something, but what you do. You know, some farmers actually do things, but there are organic farmers that don't do much. They don't even spread their manure. It depends, you know? So then the land can decline also, even if you're just not spraying chemicals, but you still should be doing something, 'cause you're taking the hay off. So, but with biodynamics it taught us a rhythm of how you—'cause you don't always have enough manure to cover your land every year, so how do you think about it, how do you do it. And maybe...maybe he knew that this was going to happen eventually, that people were gonna not know how to do things. And, even the Amish, they are supposedly traditional, but they have forgotten a lot of the old methods of farming, and I was surprised by that. And even when they do firewood, they don't know the kind of wood. They don't know what kind of trees to cut down or—it's just surprising how things disappear over time. So, I thought that was a big help for us to actually come up with a system that makes sense, and make sure that all of our fields have fertilizer, regardless of how far they are. So, you know, our farthest field, we can go stack the manure there, and then later on we'll go and spread it. So each field is cared for, you know, and then you can write it down, be straight on that. You try and make your manure piles, actually, look good too. I thought that was interesting, because it makes you respect the manure, whereas a lot of times it's just manure. Nobody cares about it. So in biodynamics you try and make your windrows a certain height, and a certain width. And then you want 'em to be as consistent so you can walk on them and put the preps in without getting gross. So, it just makes you think, the manure's actually really important, and it's not just a waste products, and you kind of have reverence for it. I think it's all about having reverence for things; with biodynamics you start to feel that. When you're out there, spraying by hand, you start to really look around and see how important the land is, you feel reverence for it, it makes you appreciate things more, I think. It really helps. And I think that's part of the way that he was thinking about it when he did it. Each thing has a lot of different ways of looking at it. I don't know if—it doesn't make any sense when you know about conventional science and you try to understand it. But I guess we just had the faith from some of the things he said that were so true, that we decided to do it even though we didn't understand a lot of it. And we didn't know anything about the plants standing between the earth and the cosmos, and the cosmos having so much effect on the plant because the plant doesn't have its own real body, and so the forces from the whole universe come

into the plant, and that's why they have different color flowers because they're associated with different planets and why a plant might be viney, and why a conifer is different than a oak tree, and it has to do with the planetary association, and all that. Which is just amazing. And why not? Because the whole thing, they try to talk about it being random or something, but that if you work with living aspect, you could see that couldn't possibly be true. And if the creator created the earth then why wouldn't the whole universe have some relationship to why the earth is the way it is. They think that, oh, they're going to go to these planets, but the planets have an effect on the earth and they don't realize it. I guess some people probably do, because they can predict certain weather patterns that have to do with the planets being aligned a certain way and the sunspots and all that jazz. But most of us are unaware of it; we're not taught astronomy in that sense, anymore, which I think we should be. [*Referring to the newborn calf*]: Luckily there's an Amish guy that wants a couple of bull calves. (laughs)

01:21:18

HH: You are pretty much in Amish country where you are.

SK: Yes, that's what attracted us to it, 'cause of all the horses and the fields, and we wanted to use horses too but we're not so good at it.

HH: Do you have horses?

SK: Yeah, we do.

HH: And do you use them, yet? Or is it just—

SK: We have, but it's just—you get used to going a certain speed and it's just really hard to do it. Depends on who's home, and who's doing it and stuff. We need more people here to do that, and the son that's here now, he was doing it with my oldest daughter, a little bit when he was younger, but he's not really into it. So, we'll see.

HH: I just—that one's pretty, with the white. Are you milking twice a day?

SK: Yes.

HH: And so is it—I mean, are you walking around with the machine? Is that how—

SK: Yes, it plugs into that—the rubber hose plugs into that.

HH: Okay, and how long does it—you said you milk thirty-five, forty—

SK: Well, I don't know, it must—right now there's a lot of—these are all dry cows right here. So, we're only milking barely thirty right now. But there's—most of them are due in June. So, by June we're going to be up in the high thirties.

HH: And how long does a milking take you?

SK: Little less than an hour right now.

HH: Really.

SK: But then you have to wash the machines, before and after getting ready, moving feed around, whatever. It takes longer, it probably takes three hours with all the other stuff to do.

HH: Oh, okay.

SK: Unless we really get everything done in the proper order and nobody messes up.

HH: Yeah. So is it—so far with a small number of animals, or you know, small by today's standards, number of animals you're milking, is working for you economically? I mean, are you—right now you're—

SK: Well, we had some of the other money that we got when—from various people when—that left us money. Buy equipment that we couldn't—we paid cash with that, you know, with stuff like that so don't have any loans, but that's the only reason why we, I think—you know, most people have to have somebody working out, and because of that, we got through. And that's really the only reason we could even move this last time, we wouldn't have even thought about it, if we didn't have that. And then we could invest some of it in the cheese room, and getting upgraded tractors, and stuff. They're used, they're old, but they still weren't cheap. But, yeah it's cheaper if you just sit there and do nothing.

(laughs) That's what everyone says when they get rid of the cows, they have plenty of money, 'cause it costs money to do any of this, you don't really make anything. It all goes—I mean you get, you know, when we're doing good, we can get seven thousand dollar milk checks. But, when we're not doing good it can be less than two. But it doesn't matter, you know? It all just goes away; it just flows through your fingers, you know, you just touch it and it goes. It's not like—there's just—everything is expensive, it's amazing. Just amazing. Even just buying water tubs and fences and—it's just crazy. It's just little stuff. I try not to go anywhere, because as soon as you go anywhere, it's a hundred dollars—

01:25:11

HH: Yeah!

SK: —so I just try to stay home, and then I don't spend anymore. *(laughs)*

HH: But, I thought it was one of the first things you said was—so you were doing it because you wanted to do something positive.

SK: Yeah.

HH: And as a way to raise your family.

SK: Yeah

HH: So it's—

SK: We're trying to do—

HH: —I mean how are you with your decision to be doing this?

SK: To do this? I can't imagine I would want to do anything else. So... but we are excited about making cheese and hopefully that will do something, so then the future generations will have something, if they want to continue the farm, because it's a dead end to just ship milk from thirty-five or forty cows. And we've known that for a long time. And we didn't really know what would happen, so that was what we came up with. We were never gonna expand, that never made sense to us, 'cause if you're losing money on thirty five cows, why do you want to lose twice as much if you milk seventy? *(laughs)*

HH: Right.

SK: And that's just draining to spend that much time milking, and hauling that much feed, and you have to have the right size for what you enjoy. And people just have—I think—I'm not against big farms at all, I just think farms should be sized for the amount of cows that they can really handle, and that means they should be outside, too. So if you can manage to milk seven hundred cows and they get to go outside, that's fine. But, I think that's really gonna have to be the rule for everybody at some point. 'Cause what is the point of making food that's poisonous to people? And cruel for the animals. I think we have to strive to be a moral society, always. And I think as human beings that's essential. And that will solve so many problems. And every time I feel like I try to do what is right for my calves. Just because it's a bull calf, I treat it the same way as a heifer, and I let the mother keep the calf for a month, 'cause I feel like I can't ship a two-day-old infant to the auction. And the mother says no, and I just can't do that, so I think all decisions have to be made by morals and not money. And when we can do that, then we'll have a society we can be proud of, and until then then I think it's pretty shameful. So, hopefully we'll get there. But, I think it's possible. But all these other things make everything so convoluted, it's hard to see—and there's all these excuses, like there's never any money or whatever, you know. There's no money, somebody robs a bank, why is that bad? Should say fine, didn't hurt anyone. But you're supposed to abuse your animals 'cause there's not enough money? I don't see that. Seems like it would be more ethical to rob the bank.

01:28:45

HH: Is that one out there like a Holstein mix, or does it just have strange coloring?

SK: Well, I actually heard her mother was part shorthorn, but they're usually red, so, I don't know why she has the wild spots.

HH: They're very beautiful .

SK: All the color breeds are pretty interesting. You don't see as many, but there's Ayshires, Guernsey, Balancers, and shorthorns. But the organic farms tend to have the other breeds, now. But there's still a few Guernsey herds down near Watertown, here and there.

HH: Well, thank you. Is there anything you would want to say, for the purposes of this interview? *(laughs)* In closing or just anything you know that haven't asked.

SK: Well, I hope that in the future farming can be still available to young people like we were when we had nothing and we could start a farm. And now I think it's so hard for young people, 'cause a fifty cow

farm costs you half a million dollars, and how can anyone have the ability to do that, and I think you people should be able to make the choices that we did for the future. And there are young people doing it, they're doing it smaller than what we considered, and they're starting with one or two cows. And really, I guess, I think that's probably the future, is really small farms. And I hope that people that like good food will continue to support the smaller, even micro farms. For the health of the animals, and themselves, and the earth. Thank you.

HH: Thank you.

01:30:43

End of recording.