

CAL KRAHMER

October 8, 1996

Tape 7, Side 1

M.O'R.: This is Michael O'Rourke for the Washington County Historical Society, and today is the 7th of October, and this is a continuation of the interview with Cal Krahmer at his home in Cornelius.

We were talking about your farming career. Why don't you start by just telling me some of the background of the farm here?

C.K.: This was one of the Emrick Donation Land Claim, which - DLCs came into being when Oregon was a territory. And it had already been split before my great-grandfather came here, but my great-grandfather then bought what was supposed to be 80 acres here at that time. And I'm the fourth generation from great-grandfather on the place. My great-grandfather was a blacksmith, and he made wine.

M.O'R.: Did you ever taste his wine?

C.K.: No, I did not know my great-grandfather. He died in 1928, which was a couple years before I was born, and so consequently I didn't get to know him. But he was a traveler and he came from Germany and stopped in Pennsylvania, where there was some other relatives of his, and then came on to Oregon by train and then by boat to Portland from San Francisco.

And then he did make a trip back to Chicago to the World's Fair one time, when the train was here to Portland, and I don't know but I suspect that he visited relatives in Pennsylvania when he made that trip. I guess that was an opportunity. My grandfather and my father really were not travelers. My grandfather never, as far as I know, never got out of the State of Oregon. My father was on the farm in World War II and I was born before that

and so, until World War II was over, nobody did very much traveling. There wasn't fuel for cars and there wasn't the time or the opportunities before that. After World War II, all of us got to do a little bit more traveling, and my father still wasn't much of a traveler, but he did make it to the East Coast to visit my brother one time when he was in college. And he also made it to Alaska one time. And California. And that's about the extent of his travels, those three directions.

M.O'R.: And of course, you've managed to do a little bit more traveling than that.

C.K.: Oh, yes. I've crossed the United States 36 times. So I did a lot more of that traveling. When my great-grandfather got the place, there was no land clear. So my grandfather cleared most of the place. It had fir trees on it, and they just dumped them and rubbed them and burned them. And that was typically the way it was in Oregon then.

M.O'R.: There wasn't much of a market for the timber then?

C.K.: No. And he cleared floodland first. It was the most productive, and the one piece of floodland that was cleared first, I heard that he raised wheat on it fifteen years straight.

M.O'R.: And that's unusual to be able to raise it without ...

C.K.: Well, with virgin land you can get by with that.

M.O'R.: Otherwise you have to rotate it out every now and then?

C.K.: In 1924, my grandfather bought another 20 acres, and this is where my house is now. He bought that from the Reeves' place and part of it was to be able to get the bottom here, because everybody was raising onions at that time. Even in the early 1900s, onions was a very speculative and a very lucrative crop, or it could be a very drag on the market, you know. And of course, in

the Tualatin Valley, there was onions raised all over in the low ground and shipped by rail all over the United States.

By the time my father started farming, the place was completely cleared. And my grandfather had developed it into a general farm with 20 dairy cows, and of course all the farming was done with horses. And they had chickens and pigs. Milk and eggs was the thing that was sold for cash and everything else was raised to support the cattle and the rest of the livestock and the family. My dad did not change the operation of the farm from how my grandfather had it almost at all. He improved some of the buildings, did some of those things, but he never made very many changes. I started farming then in 1955.

M.O'R.: That's when you took over the operation from your dad?

C.K.: That's when I took over. I farmed one year as a partnership with my father.

M.O'R.: One thing I was going to ask you about that. We talked earlier about your interest in high tech at that time. Electronics, I guess, was an interest of yours, and you'd had some training, and that could have been a career path as well. I don't remember if I asked you what it was about farming that really did it for you, that really appealed to you, that made you make that choice.

C.K.: Well, I did like to farm. But it was also a family tradition that the oldest son took over the farm, the family farm, and I guess that ever since I was old enough to understand, it had been drilled into me that I was supposed to take over the farm. And I did like to farm, and fortunately I found I a wife that thought farming was all right. So that's one of the strongest reasons that we came back to the farm.

M.O'R.: What is it about farming that you like, or liked?

C.K.: Well, when I got into farming, it was a real challenge. And of course, I'm very proud of the fact that I started farming when I did and farmed through an era in agriculture that was very changeable, very variable. Probably the thing that made it most variable, or changeable, was the advent of chemicals such as chemical fertilizers and pesticides. And that was a very challenging and very interesting aspect of agriculture, and of course the other part was that everybody was going into irrigation and irrigation paid very well, and so that took engineering, and of course chemistry and engineering was always a challenge to me and it was always very easy for me, I could understand it. And so there was never a dull moment as far as agriculture was concerned.

I first started farming as a dairy and a general farm, as my father and grandfather had. But it was also the advent of cheaper feeds for livestock that would produce more milk, and diet for the animals was very important. So those were all challenges in how to balance the feed for the animals to get the most production. And of course production was dollars in your pocket. I started farming with three horses and two tractors and 20 cows. Had a few hogs. The first year that I farmed, dairy was really in the dumps. Hogs was really in the dumps as far as prices were concerned. Our friends in town was Hank Herring that has the Super Center in Cornelius.

M.O'R.: Hank's Thriftway.

C.K.: Yes. But in those days there wasn't the meat inspections and so forth, and so one way I could make a few dollars with the hogs was I'd go in there and ask him how many he wanted a week, and I butchered them and delivered them, and he paid me dressed out prices for them, which made it so I could at least buy the feed for the next bunch.

M.O'R.: So you got a better price if you sold direct ..

C.K.: Yes. But those were some of the things that we had to do. I farmed along that way for nine years. Was able to pay my bills but I couldn't get ahead as far as on the farm was concerned, and so I started raising cucumbers. I think it was the third year that Nalley's had come into the area, and so I planted ten acres of cucumbers. Made \$5,000 on the darn things. Started picking them about the middle of July and ended the middle of October, and when I got done the milk inspector came and he says, "You gotta do all these things for the cows you got."

I says, "That's gonna take a lot of money, and those cows didn't make that."

And he says, "Well, I know the cows don't make that, but you made it in cucumbers, so you've got the money, so you're gonna make the changes and upgrade this dairy." I already had 35 cows then. He made me mad. And at the same time, Farm Bureau Insurance Company offered me a job as insurance agent. So I went down to my dad and I told him what had happened and I says, "You know, I'm going to sell those cows." And he says, "I don't blame you."

M.O'R.: So he was all right with that.

C.K.: Yeah. And so before the inspector could come back and see if I had improved any, the cows were gone. So I sold insurance for Farm Bureau Insurance Company one year.

M.O'R.: Did you farm that year also?

C.K.: I farmed that year also; I had cucumbers. And I also went about deciding how I was going to alter my farming operations so I could make some money. So the insurance job was real good because I was dealing with farmers and I could see what they were doing and I could see which ones were making money. And so that had helped me make my decision.

But I had three ways to go. I could either just really upgrade and put in a hundred dairy cows and be in the dairy

business. Or I could make hog operation and make money at hogs. And I knew I could do that. Or I could go into row crops, which was kind of what everybody was doing. Strawberries and cucumbers and beans and all those kinds of things. And so I also had to have a bank loan to do that and I'd never had any experience with the banks.

So I went in and talked to the banks, and we decided to go with the row crop business. And so I planted row crops, strawberries, and I planted evergreen and chehelem berries, put in 22 acres of them, 10 acres of strawberries. Bought buses, started recruiting help, and went into the row crop business. Very quickly found out that you can't support a farm with the insurance business. And so I ended up spending all my time farming and eventually I give up the insurance business because it just didn't provide enough money to support a farm.

M.O'R.: And it took too much time?

C.K.: Yes, it took time, and I needed to put that into the farm. So that's when we switched over to the row crops.

M.O'R.: How did it work out that first year?

C.K.: Of course, there was no strawberries and none of the other crops either. But there was cucumbers.

M.O'R.: You mean they just didn't work out that year?

C.K.: Well, the first year of planting strawberries, there's not a crop, and the same thing with the other berries. And so that first year I was still selling insurance and I was raising cucumbers. And then the next year, I got strawberries, got some trailing berries. The first year of chehelems and evergreens are usually a short crop, but they're easy to pick. And of course, I just kept on going.

Then I started renting land and I started really going from - with the cows, we were looking at \$12,000 a year gross income. And

three years after I had started in the row crop business, I was up to \$100,000 a year gross income. So that's the way we started, and I rented then 80 acres over by the Farmington School, and then I just kept on renting more land and eventually I got up to over 400 acres.

In 1977, two of my sons graduated. One graduated from high school the year before, and another one a year after that. So we were then looking for ways to bring my sons into the operation. So in '77, we formed a partnership and a corporation both. And we've used that corporation. It's still in existence. One son is not in it any more, but another son is, and it's that kind of an operation that you can change the membership. I went from a full-time partner and I'm now 10 percent of the partnership is all, the wife and I.

M.O'R.: So is this a corporate kind of structure, then? What do you call it, a limited partnership?

C.K.: Yes, a limited partnership. And then there's still the corporation. Now the corporation handles all of the hand harvesting, and of course the hand harvesting started out with cucumbers and strawberries and blackberries, and over the years, we've gotten rid of the blackberries and the cucumbers. We've still got strawberries, but the zucchini is hand harvested and broccoli is hand harvested, so the corporate operation is still viable, still usable, and we pay all our health through the corporation. The operating of the farm has been by the partnership,

M.O'R.: One question I was going to ask in terms of your decision to go that way when the time came, it sounds like you got involved in a lot of activities that you weren't previously involved in. In particular, you said that you needed to get some buses and get more help. Did you find yourself sort of moved into

more of a more managerial or administrative role? And if so, how did you like that?

C.K.: I moved into a manger, a management role, and it wasn't a choice but I ended up learning how to do it. I studied very hard on learning how to be a good manager and how to deal with help.

M.O'R.: Did you take courses in that?

C.K.: Usually there was courses that was offered, not necessarily in college, but in the extension. One of the things that when I went into this was the bank. Well, the bank - I had just got involved in the computer program with Bob Oley. And he was a financial consultant out of Salem. And we were doing our bookkeeping on a mainframe out of Washington State, and we were putting all our entries on paper and then sending it every month up there. And the bank insisted and really wanted me to stay on the corporate bookkeeping and turn that information into them once a month as to how the farm was doing. And so that's how we got started into the computer. Then a few years later, then the IBM PC came along. So that's when then Bob Oley then pulled his program out of the mainframe, hired a - and he formed a corporation there, and had a couple partners that were programmers, and we ended up buying a PC and we were the guinea pigs for transferring that program over onto the home-size computer.

M.O'R.: You told me a little bit about that part before, and that you wound up actually being the first one to pioneer that, I guess, out here.

C.K.: And so that was done in the early '70s. And all throughout the '70s.

M.O'R.: The PC didn't come along until ...

C.K.: Late '70s.

M.O'R.: Late '70s, that's right. You mentioned earlier the challenge of moving into this new era of farming with the chemical

fertilizers and pesticides. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about how you used to do it. Before pesticides and chemicals, and then how it changed. We can start with that.

C.K.: Well, on the general farm we didn't use too much. The main thing was flyspray for the cattle that was acceptable around milk.

M.O'R.: You mean in the old days, or are you talking more recently?

C.K.: Well, in the old days. In the '60s. And the other things that we did was liming and rotations and some of those things that we were using to control the weeds and the pests. And so, in those days, I guess in modern day they call it somewhat like organic farming. We did those things before we had the modern pesticides, but we never quit doing those things either.

So we continued to do that, and then when we got in the row crop business, then we used a lot more pesticides, and of course when I first got in, there was only a few that was really available. And that was DDT and copper and sulphur. And captan was one of the fungicides that we used. But DDT and captan was basically what we used on strawberries and the kingberries. I can remember the day that the field man come around and tell me to use it, and he'd say use a pound to the acre of DDT. Well, I talked to my neighbors and they'd say, "Well, gosh, if he recommended a pound, use three because then you're sure to get 'em." And that landed a lot of people into trouble with the pesticide.

M.O'R.: Because they used too much.

C.K.: Yes. And DDT was perfectly safe to people, but as you know the history of it, it got into the water and of course it'd been used by the cities and government for controlling mosquitoes for years. If you wanted to know what was going on, just look over

toward Hillsboro. Every morning that airplane would be flying over Jackson Bottom, you know, spreading DDT.

M.O'R.: Keep the mosquitoes down there.

C.K.: Keep the mosquitoes down. And everybody thought it was a good deal. But you know, we lost DDT because of it. And it was a very good chemical, a very safe chemical, and a lot of us wish we had it back. We'd use it with discretion and it probably wouldn't hurt a thing.

M.O'R.: But they were overdoing it in those days.

C.K.: Yes, they overdid it. About 1980, Ron Collins came into the area and offered his services as a consultant for the use of chemicals. And he also helped us with our fertilizers and those things too.

M.O'R.: He was somebody who had some expertise in this area?

C.K.: He was an entomologist. Analysis training. And he set up here in the County and when he came to me, he says, "I would like to work for you as an entomologist, this is what it's going to cost you." But he says, "I'll probably save you more money in chemicals than what my salary's going to be."

So I hired him on as a consultant for the use of our chemicals, and we're still using the consultant today. We really believe in that. Of course, his sons are operating it now, he's not in it. But when they go into the field and they have a pattern that they check it out for bugs and they talk about economic thresholds and things like that, and they know how a pest is going to go, like the worm, if it's small and on the bottom of the bush, it's not in the head. But they know how fast it's growing and when it's going to get to the head. And if you're going to harvest them before it gets to the head, why spray it?

But see, in the field then for the processing companies, as soon as they see a worm, they say, "Spray." They don't care where

it's at. So that was how the consultant saved us thousands of dollars in chemicals, is because we withheld the sprays when we didn't have to, and there was times when he'd come and we'd say, "Okay, we're going to be done in two days." And he'd say, "Cut it in the morning, because they won't move up until in the afternoon when the temperature rises." And so those were ways that we really saved money in that.

And so his approach was kind of to minimize the use of expensive chemicals and fertilizers, or to optimize it financially speaking. And of course, they've got into the IPM program quite heavy now, trying to use even less pesticides, and only when there's an economic threshold that gets too far along, you do it. Now there's some crops we raise, like broccoli. One worm in one load is all you're allowed.

[End of Tape 7, Side 1]

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Tape 7, Side 2

M.O'R.: Okay, so you said you spray a little more on the broccoli than you think you might have to.

C.K.: Yeah. If the requirements weren't so strict, you wouldn't probably spray quite so often.

M.O'R.: And the requirement is imposed on you by the packer?

C.K.: Yes.

M.O'R.: And they do a kind of spot check of your load when they pick it up?

C.K.: When you deliver, they go through one box out of 20. So if you deliver 40 boxes, they go through two boxes. And they grade every head. They check every one for worms and other pests.

M.O'R.: And if they find more than one worm, you're out of business?

C.K.: They reject the load.

M.O'R.: That's a pretty strict standard, I guess. In recent years, in terms of consumer consciousness - I guess the bulk of consumers out there are buying vegetables that are conventionally grown, but there is this growing trade in organic produce. I wondered if you ever looked at that to see whether that would be an economic thing for you to do. Did you ever get into organic farming at all?

C.K.: No. And I don't believe in it. The consumer demands a quality that you cannot get it in straight organic farming. Unless you use a pesticide to control some of the pests or funguses or whatever you want to call them, you cannot get a quality that most consumers demand.

M.O'R.: The organic crops get you a higher price, presumably, on the market, wouldn't they?

C.K.: It takes price and product both to be able to make a living in this. Some of those things, especially fungicides, they can wipe them out so quick, they can wipe out a crop. No matter what the price is, it don't do no good if you got nothing to sell.

M.O'R.: So it's a sort of a gamble if you don't spray the fungicide on there.

C.K.: Yes, it is. You know. California scale and all those things, you know, are real easy to control. There's no residue problems or anything else, you know. But if you're doing organic, you don't control it.

M.O'R.: You just have to take whatever you get. Another thing I was curious about, you mentioned that when you first got into row crops, part of the reason was that noticed that \$5,000 you made the one year off the cucumbers when Nalley's came in here, I wonder if you could talk a little bit about how the food processing business changed out here with people like Nalley's coming in. And then I know, of course, later on you got involved with NorPac and part of that. I just wondered if you could talk a little bit about that, how that kind of aspect of the business has developed.

C.K.: When I started into row crops, Nalley's had come in with cucumbers. Their growing area had been all the way from Vancouver B.C. down to Puget Island, and then they went on down to Portland. They had a receiving station there, but they were expanding in cucumbers, and so they came out here, then, one year, and talked my neighbor into growing some, and of course he grew them and they picked them and put them in sacks and sewed the sack and then put them on a truck and hauled them to Portland and unloaded them there in sacks. Then the next year, they went to boxes.

And I was one of those that got in on that the first year, when they had boxes. The receiving station was in Cornelius, at what they called the flax plant. I didn't even have a truck, all I had was a hay wagon and a tractor. I hooked the tractor on the front of the hay wagon and I planted my rows so I could go down through the field with that hay wagon and tractor, and I had about a dozen pickers and I could stay right with them, and we just filled the boxes then right on the hay wagon. Never had to have a loader because I didn't have a loading tractor. And then when I got a load, I could haul eight boxes. When I got a load, we took them into town and they unloaded them, put empty boxes on my wagon, and I came back out. At that time, it was Sunset Packing, not Flavorland, was the other operation. And of course Burnside was here in the Valley.

M.O'R.: And these - Birdseye and the other operation - were the ones that had been here before?

C.K.: Yes, they had been here before. And Birdseye was pretty limited to broccoli and strawberries. And of course, Flavorland or Sunset, they were taking no vegetables, but all berries. Then there was a couple other little processors around too. So I got involved with Sunset because they had a good field man, still around, Bob Schlegel's his name, and he was a very good field man, and took good care of his growers. And for a person starting out not knowing what he was getting into, that was one of the things you looked for, a person who could help you out.

M.O'R.: What kind of help did he give you?

C.K.: It was advice, consulting, and it was their crop also as well as mine, and he give me advice and pesticides and fertilizer and management. And I've always been in debt to him because he did such a good job for me. Then a couple years later, Knudsen Pickle Company was looking for growers, and so I got involved with

them. So then I had two contracts for pickles, one with Knudsen's and one with Nalley's, and I grew several years for them that way. When Sunset Packing - we just didn't always get along real well, so there was another plant right beside them that Dwayne Heikus has now, but it was at that time it was Barbie's. And he handled for Noling. But he was shipping a lot of strawberries to Canada, and I had planted a new variety called Shucksons. I was the first grower of Shucksons in the County. The first year I raised them, the producing year, I got eleven tons to the acre.

M.O'R.: Was that one of their main appeals, then, they were high yield.

C.K.: They were high yield. So he wanted to know if they would ship. Well, I delivered a few to him and he shipped them to Canada, and they were mold by the time they got up there. So the next year, when I went back to him, I says, "I think I can do a better job, but I just gotta do some things a little different. I'm going to put on half a case of captan on a little later than I have been. And so I did that. And I shipped all that season to Canada and he did some things different, too. We got them in the cooler early in the day, right after they were picked, and then he put them on a reefer about 4:00 o'clock that afternoon, they were in Canada by 8:00 o'clock that night. And they were very pleased with those strawberries, and so we got into shipping strawberries to Canada. And I did that several years.

In all this time, though, I knew that I was farming by contract with the processor on the contract. And there was only an annual contract, and he could either give it to me or take it away from me, it was his choice. And that happened a lot of times. And it happened with me on the cucumbers. I had my contracts taken away from me, so I was out of the cucumber business. At that time, there was a co-op called United Co-op in the area here, and it was

pretty much in this area, although their plant was at Newberg, and one also at Gresham. So I got involved with the co-op, and of course, one of the things that was done then was, if you wanted beans, you had to grow strawberries. The two contracts were tied together. If you raised one acre of strawberries for them, you got two or three acres of beans for them. Of course, by then, the beans were not pole beans anymore, although there was some still raised. They were bush beans, and they were picked by machine. And it was one of the more lucrative crops to raise too.

M.O'R.: Strawberries are a little more chancy, a little more difficult, and that's why they would link the two, is that it?

C.K.: I'm not sure that was the case, but strawberries was a crop that was easy to sell. It made money. So I then joined the co-op and of course when you join a co-op, you're a probationary member, usually lasts two or three years, then you become a member. You can be a voting member. Well, I had joined them in '79 - '69. And in '72 NorPac, which was then Stayton Canning yet, bought - or United joined up with them - and merged with Stayton. And so that's how I got into Stayton Canning.

The first years, I delivered my products to Gresham, then they closed the Gresham plant, and of course they never did open the Newberg one. Then after that I delivered to Dayton. And I've always had to deliver the broccolis to Brooks. Brooks plant was called was a mainline was the original builder of that plant and they only operated about two years. And they went bankrupt and NorPac bought the plant then at a distress sale, and they went into the broccoli business, and that's when I went into broccoli with NorPac.

M.O'R.: These plants are still some distance away from your farm, at least that one is.

C.K.: Well, you see, Birdseye was still in broccoli a few years after I started. They were the original ones that started the way that broccoli was grown for many, many years around here, and that is in beds. It was one of their field men that went to - Well, he was with United and then was in Stayton with the merger, that knew how to do this with broccoli, and it was through his knowledge that Stayton got involved in broccoli. And of course now, they raise about 1200 acres of broccoli. And they still don't get enough, they still buy out of Mexico to fill their pack.

Since then, Birdseye has gone out of business completely in the State of Oregon, and Nalley's is almost out of business. Nalley's was owned when I grew for them by Mr. Nalley. He eventually sold out, he got to the age he wanted to retire, and it's now a cooperative and it's all a different change. Sunset Packing changed their name to Flavorland, but they did after they sold. The original developers of Flavorland - there's a couple of them living yet - but they sold out and then the name was changed. I think a Canadian organization owns them no

But because I went the co-op direction, which I didn't mention was, it guaranteed my contract year after year. It may vary in size, depending on what their needs are, but I never lose my contract. They can't transfer it to somebody else. We have - With NorPac we have contracts for strawberries, beans, zucchini, broccoli and corn.

M.O'R.: Do you have some ownership in that co-op as well?

C.K.: Well, like a half a million dollars worth.

M.O'R.: That's not the kind of relationship you had with the other packers.

C.K.: No. No. We have an ownership. And that volume of money is turning over about once every ten years, sometimes every nine years. The way the co-op works is that you invest in that co-

op and it's based on the size or volume of your crop that you deliver. And of course, it changes every year because the volume changes.

M.O'R.: So a certain percentage of the value of your crop each year winds up being invested in the co-op. It runs about eight to ten percent. And of course, the size, you know, we've been expanded rather continuously, and so consequently you get more and more involved, more dollars involved in it, you know. And if you deliver half a million dollars now, ten percent of that is \$50,000. So it's not hard to get to that, you know?

And there's a lot of farms around here, there's about a dozen farmers around here that are delivering NorPac, and several of them deliver well over half a million dollars worth of product to them. So the row crop business has got to be big business, and it's still what I consider a family farm. The definition of a family farm depends on who's saying it, but if you come to me and say - Well, a family farm is that the owner and his family does all the work, and they spend all their time working and don't have time to watch TV, that's not a family farm to me. A family farm is one that has enough volume and enough net profit in it that the family can enjoy a quality of life like the urban people can. And that's the way it should be.

M.O'R.: So for you, a family farm - there's a minimum size for a family farm.

C.K.: You gotta have enough volume so that there's enough net profit in it so that you can enjoy life.

M.O'R.: And the farms that are smaller than that sort of fall in the hobby farm category?

C.K.: The hobby farm category, and if they work outside, that's all they do, they don't have time or they don't have the money to do anything else. And that's not right.

M.O'R.: It sounds like the co-op has worked out pretty well for you over the years.

C.K.: It has and they're cussed and discussed, and you know, we've got a lot of money invested in them, but our contracts are salable and with the base acres that we have, we have quite a bit of money invested in that part. And of course then there's our land and our equipment besides.

M.O'R.: Now if you were to decide to pull out of the co-op, would you sell your share or something?

C.K.: Yes, we'd sell it.

M.O'R.: And then, some other farmer would buy it then.

C.K.: And all of those contracts are salable.

M.O'R.: So it actually is a somewhat liquid investment, then, or it could be.

C.K.: Yes. Yep.

M.O'R.: And how's the co-op managed?

C.K.: It's managed by a board of directors and a manager. The board of directors are growers. That's always been one of the real questions in my mind. They got 800 permanent employees and 5,000 part-time employees, and I guess I've always thought if you had a true co-op, then at least the permanent employees were part of it also and thought they should be part of that. But I don't talk that around very much, even though I believe it. A lot of growers would feel that they were giving up some of control of the co-op if they let the employees be part of management also.

M.O'R.: I see what you're saying. So the part-time employees are the farmers with the contracts, is that what you mean?

C.K.: No, no. The growers are the owners of the co-op.

M.O'R.: I see. And the part-time employees, they're even lower down the ladder.

C.K.: Yeah, they only work usually about three or four months, some of them only six weeks. The full-time employees of course work full time.

M.O'R.: Right. And those are the ones that you think that should have a piece of the operation as well.

C.K.: You know, there's years when we don't get that much money. The prices are just down and I think the employees ought to share in that. But when we get a lot of money and make money, then they should share likewise with us. And I think that's right and it could be worked out. It would make them feel better too, and it would certainly make them be a lot more efficient with their work in the plant.

M.O'R.: I can see it would be a real motivation.

C.K.: Yeah, it would be motivating them so that they'd be sure that there was a profit involved.

M.O'R.: Another thing that you talked about a little while back was getting into hiring more and more help on the farm. You expanded, obviously, you had the operation down here in Farmington, et cetera. How has that worked out for you over the years? I know in recent years, Krahmer Farms has actually been a target of the UFW, but I'm just wondering in general over the years what kinds of problems you may have had with labor - I don't mean organized labor necessarily, I just mean day to day problems - and how that aspect of farming, how that works for you. Is that one of the plusses or the minuses?

C.K.: Well, if you're going to have hand drivers and stuff, you got to learn to recruit and manage help. When I started out, we were using practically all school kids for the harvesting of our berry crop. And I haven't mentioned to you, but we did end up with an iron wino. I'll talk about that later, if you want to.

M.O'R.: Wound up with a what?

C.K.: An iron wino. But it was a full job, and you had to be organized to be able to recruit the help in the schools and get them out. When we first started, we were getting kids with their mothers, and they were coming out and they were picking strawberries, and of course then, the bigger kids we kept for the cucumbers. And then we got into the broccoli and we was able to select out 13- 14- 15-year-olds for cutting broccoli, and they were very good at it.

M.O'R.: So the idea is that the cucumbers and the broccoli need a little more care in the harvesting?

C.K.: Well, no. It's just how we got them harvested. Then along came the 12-year-old law. And that has been a very bad law, as far as I'm concerned. Originally, mothers were coming out with their 8, 10-year-old kids, working with them, teaching them how to work. And by the time they were twelve years old and they left mom then, they knew how to work, they knew how to pick, and they could pick enough that they could make money.

And then the 12-year-old law came in, and all of a sudden we didn't have no mothers left. And the 12-year-olds came out, and they didn't no how to pick. And it ended up, we hung with the kids for a long time, but there was three or four years where it took more management than what the kids could earn. They just didn't know how, they didn't care, and they'd come out and play, and so it was a real disaster.

At that same time, the Mexicans were coming in more, and so we found one fellow, and we told him, "Bring your family and help us out." Well, we ended up with about twenty of them, I guess, one year. And they worked by themselves. We had one checker with them, one guy kind of keeping order with them. Those twenty guys picked way more fruit than a hundred kids would. And we didn't have no overhead with them hardly, you know?

M.O'R.: Did you have overhead with the kids, then?

C.K.: Oh, yeah. With all the management help to try to keep orders, and they had checkers and stuff like that. It was to the point it was requiring about one manager for every ten kids. And that was way too much and they didn't produce that much. And so we ended up just forgetting about it, the kids, and we started building some places for Mexicans to live on our farm. We never had to have a state inspection because we were not a contractor, we didn't hire out, we just used them all for our own labor for our own use. So the law didn't require that. I think we had to be inspected, but we knew we was going to have to build something, so we decided to go with a kitchen and a bathing facilities and use chemical toilets. And of course the summer before that, there was a bad fire up at Gaston that killed about a half a dozen Mexicans. And so we knew the State was quite aware of that problem, and we were concerned about that problem also.

M.O'R.: The problem of -?

C.K.: Fire. And the reason that they were so dangerous was they were building cabins that held about eight people, and then they had a gas stove and a kitchen facilities in that building also for those eight people.

[End of Tape 7, Side 2]