

CAL KRAHMER

October 8, 1996

Tape 8, Side 1

C.K.: So that's why we thought about doing it this way. We never got a permit to build, because we knew nobody would approve it. The regulatory people couldn't - I mean they just had it set in their mind that this is the way a camp was supposed to be built, and they were very dangerous. So we built this kitchen and we had then some sleeping quarters around, and we asked that no smoking be in the sleeping quarters, and took all the fire possibilities out. We tried to take all the radios and everything out too, but that didn't work. So we ended up rewiring them in a safe way so they could use a radio and so forth, reasonably safe in them. But we tried. You know, they even eliminate that fire hazard and it didn't work. And then of course, one of the things that the State required was that there be a hammer-type fire alarm outside the cabins. And it could be in a central place. And we says, "Why do you want that?"

"Well, that's what the law says."

We says, "We know there's smoke alarms available now, that's what we would like to put in because if a cabin starts on fire, we would really like those guys to get out before it kills them, you know? And a smoke alarm makes a whole lot more sense then that dang central alarm that you're talking about beause the other people aren't in danger that are going to be in the other cabins." Well, the regulations never allowed that, but the Mexicans always pull the batteries.

M.O'R.: On the smoke detectors?

C.K.: On the smoke detectors. So we went ahead and put smoke detectors in the cabins, and we always put two in, and we tried to

put them beyond the reach of the Mexicans. And we did follow their regulations and put that up. But we've done some of those kind of things. We don't get an inspection from the State no more. They inspected us once, and they says, "Well, you're so far in advance of the State on what a housing should be that we don't even have to inspect you."

M.O'R.: These are migrant worker populations, then, people that don't actually have a place to live in the area?

C.K.: Right. And we've always stuck with men only. Never have any women. Now that is changing, because we've helped two families already get their families up here. The law now allows for families to come in legally. And we've been working with INS, and INS has a person out here whose job it is is to take those that want to become permanent residents in the area to be able to get their families up here. And we've done two, we've got two more pending, and in those situations, we have to help them get housing and you have to guarantee them a job, a few things like that.

M.O'R.: This is permanent housing, then? And how did you pick the families? Or did they sort of select themselves?

C.K.: They select themselves, yeah.

M.O'R.: So someone comes to you and says, "I'd like to bring my family up here"?

C.K.: You've got to remember that we've got a bunch of guys out here, they're almost all related. All from the same place. And we've got a few rules, like no drunkenness. You can have beer and you can drink it reasonably, and no drugs, and a few of those things. So those guys, they won't let a druggie in camp.

M.O'R.: So they turn them in to you?

C.K.: We don't allow them a bed. And they tell us who they are and we don't allow them a bed.

M.O'R.: Do you think it's information you can rely on, or is it possible it's just clannish behavior, that they might be trying to ...

C.K.: It may be discriminatory in some aspects, but I don't know how else to do it, I don't speak the language. And none of the rest of us speak it hardly at all. My one son took two years in high school, and he doesn't speak it too well. With the abilities we've got, we have been able to control it fairly well.

M.O'R.: And you haven't had too much trouble along those lines, with drugs or alcohol?

C.K.: No. We have had with the union. Every now and then they try to plant somebody in our group. Of course, we had a big strike a year ago, and there was four guys, three or four guys, that came in here and they threatened the rest of the them that they'd beat them up if they went out and went to work. It took a little bit of going around, and we ended up with about six attorneys on the place, and from Legal Aid, and one guy from the union. So we was able to pull a pretty good deal and walked all our guys out from under them and out into the fields and wouldn't let them out into the fields.

M.O'R.: The union ones, you mean, or what?

C.K.: No, the three or four that were union, they did go to the field because they didn't want to be identified.

M.O'R.: Who were the ones you didn't let in the field?

C.K.: It was Legal Aid, and then there was a union representative with Legal Aid. Of course, Legal Aid is a government agency. I just, boy, I don't agree with what they did. I mean, they was crooked as hell.

M.O'R.: Tell me a little bit more about that.

C.K.: Well, the three or four guys that had come into the group, and then had threatened to beat them up if they went to work, were also in contact with Legal Aid and with the union.

M.O'R.: So it was an intimidation kind of tactic?

C.K.: Yes, it was.

M.O'R.: To try to get everybody to go out on strike?

C.K.: And of course the year before, we had paid a penny a pound more than they had down south, which would be the Salem area. And we were going to pay the same thing this last year. Well, then they decided they wanted a penny more, that was how the union was going to try to get the strike. Really, the union wanted to get on the farm. They didn't give a darn about the pickers. So one thing we did was we didn't tell them, we just told the workers, "Okay, you got your penny, come on with us." And they walked right with us, and they didn't tell them nothing. They just walked out. Went with us out into the field.

M.O'R.: So you gave them the penny that the union was trying to get for them anyway?

C.K.: Yeah. But we didn't let the union on the farm.

M.O'R.: So you've been with a non-union workforce all these years? And they were just trying to get in?

C.K.: Yes. Through intimidation.

M.O'R.: And that was last year?

C.K.: Yes.

M.O'R.: Okay, I had the impression that maybe it had been going on longer than that.

C.K.: No, that was that effort, and there was the effort down south. This year there hasn't been any problem, and of course the union is about broke and about out of business.

M.O'R.: Is your farm typical of other farms in the valley? Is it all a non-unionized workforce for the most part?

C.K.: Yes. The only thing that's unionize - How the union got started was with the tree planting. With a corporation, the timber corporations. And see, the timber corporations hired a contractor, and then there was a couple of contractors that ripped off their help and didn't pay them. Yes, those workers should be protected from that kind of situation.

M.O'R.: But you don't think the answer is a union that applies to all workers, agricultural workers out here?

C.K.: Well, I'm not non-union. I just haven't found a union that's honest and reasonable. And you know, I believe that there's some unions in the United States and there could be in this situation that could be a real help to the producer and to the help. And be very cooperative with them all and see to it that the help is available and those kinds of things. But that isn't what they're interested in. All the union wants to do is to take some money from somebody so they can sit around and operate. They aren't interested in helping anybody.

M.O'R.: You mentioned that you think there are some unions. Are there specific ones?

C.K.: No. I don't have any specific ones. But I have heard of some, but I've never retained the names. Well, I've got a friend who was in the timber industry, and he was a union person, and his greatest pride was is that his union was never off a day and he was always able to provide a good wage for his help and he was always able to help the employer. So that's what I'm talking about. Those guys, they've never come to us and talked to us to ask us if we'd like to be unionized. All they want to do is strike. I mean, if they can't make a big deal out of it, well, they're not interested.

M.O'R.: So they have never come to negotiate with you. Why do you think they picked your farm, of all the farms they might have picked to strike in the valley?

C.K.: I guess I don't know. They may have thought it might have been easy to pick, but it wasn't.

M.O'R.: They thought you might have been an easy first challenge?

C.K.: Well, see, Kramer Farms in Mount Angel, they've struck them now for three years.

M.O'R.: Maybe that's what I'm confusing you with. It's a different Kramer.

C.K.: Yes. They don't even know how to spell Krahmer. But they are NorPac growers also.

M.O'R.: I see. Okay. That's the confusion. I thought it was your operation that had been the target of this longer strike.

C.K.: No, we're the quiet Krahmers. Trying to stay quiet. And that's a bad deal too. That's more of an example of what I've been talking about.

M.O'R.: The other Krahmer.

C.K.: They've got a very nice living quarters, they handle their help real good, and their help makes money. They've never lost a pound of strawberries or a head of broccoli because of the union. Their help is with them, staying with them, working with them. There's pickets out on the road and their employees just bypass them.

M.O'R.: So their employees don't support the strike, then?

C.K.: No.

M.O'R.: And that was the same union?

C.K.: Yes.

M.O'R.: So they were down there and then they decided to move on you last year.

C.K.: Wherever there was maybe an opportunity. And of course these three or four guys that were here in this group came out of California from Chavez's groups. And of course, Chavez's groups are about dead in California. There's hardly anything going down there anymore. And they thought they were going to be able to stay pretty quiet, you know, and soon as it was over here, well, through means of elimination we figured out who it was real quick. And we didn't fire them, but as soon as they left, there was no way they were going to get a job back.

M.O'R.: These were the three that helped out last year? With respect to the other Krahmer, then, the longer strike, has the tactics of the union been the same, do you know, in that situation? No negotiations with them, or conversation between the union and -

C.K.: No. I don't know that.

M.O'R.: One of the things you mentioned that was a plus on both your farm and the other Krahmer's farm were the living quarters. Can you describe sort of what the quarters are like, and how they're better maybe than the average run of the mill quarters that are provided for workers?

C.K.: I'm not saying mine are better than the average, I'm just saying we have a different style of living quarters that we feel make it safer. And oh, problems. Refrigerators were always a problem. When you got the single cabin, you got to buy an old used refrigerator, and pretty soon, it quits. Where we've got a centralized kitchen, we've got a walk-in cooler and each employee's got a basket and he can lock it if he wants to. I've never seen a lock on one yet. And the central cooling system is easier to maintain and it always goes. A lot of those camps that were originally set up with flush toilets and a septic field and they were nothing but a headache. They were always plugged up, and as you know, there's a cultural thing here with the toilets that is

different. In Mexico, well, they don't put no paper down the toilet, and they wipe themselves and then put the paper in the wastebasket. And so, because of those cultural differences, it makes it harder to maintain a flush-type system. So we went with the chemical toilets and they're pumped as often as needed. When we've got a full crew in, well, he's in here twice a week. At this time of the year, we've only got a few guys there, half a dozen, well, he comes once a week. But it's certainly a lot easier than the flush toilet. And that was a real problem for those guys that had those. That's where the inspectors always got them. 'Cause there was one plugged up all the time.

M.O'R.: So anytime the inspector would walk in, he'd find something wrong.

C.K.: Right. And like screening and stuff like that, it's been really quite easier to screen our kitchen because of the design, and of course, then it kind of eliminates the real need for screening of the rest of the quarters.

M.O'R.: You mentioned that you passed the state inspections without any difficulty, but that you didn't apply for a permit to build your facilities in the beginning. So you can get away with that? With building without the permit?

C.K.: We did. I've built a few buildings, and they've tagged them, and that tag is red. But you know, after a time it turns white.

M.O'R.: So there's not a real heavy enforcement on a building permit in that situation.

C.K.: No, that's not true. There was a law that you didn't have to have a permit to build a farm building, only a house. And we didn't know where our kitchen fit in, whether it was for a permit or not, but we were pretty sure that they would want to tell us how we were supposed to build it. And we decided that it was

enough different from anything that they deal with that they weren't going to be able to tell us anything anyway, and so we went ahead and built it. It meant that we had to run the electrical power from another building rather than directly from the pole, and of course it had to have three phase because there was a cooler in it. Which we had three phase in the shop anyhow, and so we did that.

And we didn't get any outside financing from the banks or we could have got a grant from the state and we didn't go try to do that because we felt that if we did that, they would probably have put enough restrictions on it that there wasn't any money in it anyhow. But we did tell a couple of state inspectors what we were doing and they were the health inspectors, and they kind of agreed with us. So then we went ahead and did it then.

M.O'R.: So you had a little bit of sanction then from that quarter.

C.K.: Yes.

M.O'R.: Now, you had mentioned when we started this conversation about labor, you said you hired a wino? Was that it?

C.K.: Well, in the 1960s Wygants over at Canby took an old lumber carrier and made a picking machine out of it for raspberries and blackberries that were on wire. and it was quite successful, so Hudson House bought them, and then they rented them out to the farmers, and so Don Jassy and I rented three of them then, and we run them in the Tualatin Valley and as far south as McMinnville. Custom-picking blackcaps and raspberries and blackberries. And we usually started with blackcaps about the first of July and we run til the mid-September with those, picking evergreen blackberries. And we thought that was the coming thing, and it was, and of course the raspberries are practically all picked by machine now, the blackcaps all are.

M.O'R.: How does the machine work? Does it just shake them loose or something?

C.K.: Yes, it shakes them off. They have to be ripe when it shakes them off, and depending on the fruit is to how often you pick. If it's raspberries, you pick twice a week. If it's blackberries, you pick once a week.

M.O'R.: So you just go through and shake the vines, and then the ones that fall off are the ripe ones.

C.K.: Right. Then they fall into a belt and they're transferred to the top of a machine and there's they sorting belt there, and you can put four people on the sorting belt to throw out junk. And they go into crates. On the iron wino, it all went to the top and it would hold a pallet of empties and then another pallet that he could put the full ones on. And that's usually sixty crates, so it's quite a bit of weight. And of course we had them several years, and over the years, they improved them, they made them leveling and stuff like that, that the old ones weren't, but you could use them on the hillside. We never rolled one, but we sure came close a few times.

M.O'R.: So it's an effective way to pick berries.

C.K.: Yes. We did a lot of research with it. Oregon State researched a lot of aspects of it.

M.O'R.: I misunderstood you earlier. I thought you said you'd hired a wino. But you said it's the iron wino?

C.K.: Iron wino is what it was called. And of course, now the iron wino is not in existence, but there is one machine built at Stayton, one in Michigan, one in Sweden. Those three I think are used in this area now. I have seen the iron wino in Hawaii, where they tried to pick coffee with it. Told them I didn't think it would work, and I never stayed around long enough to find out if it did. But they're used all over now. In Michigan, well, they

use them on blueberries also, and we have a couple of machines in Northwest Oregon that picks blueberries with them, they pick blueberries with them.

M.O'R.: The other thing I guess I was going to ask you about was: Have you ever had any really bad years since you went to the row crops?

C.K.: Oh, yes. The most we've lost is \$100,000.

M.O'R.: Wow. That must have been a tough year.

C.K.: Yeah, it was a tough year. Then we've lost several times since then. And we've made \$100,000.

M.O'R.: So it's a game of averages, it sounds like. And in the years that you suffered losses, the main problems I suppose are weather, is that right?

C.K.: Yes. Weather was always a problem. And then the next problem is trying to get the bank to stick with you one more year so you can come out of the hole.

M.O'R.: And is that a problem for a farm like yours, that's been in business for a while?

C.K.: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Because you always change bankers ever two or three years. And we started out with Forest Grove National. Then it went to U.S. Then we ended up in the Bank out of Idaho. Then it merged with Bank of Hawaii. Now it's called Pacific One. This is all going on in the last six years, you know.

M.O'R.: I was a bit confused by Pacific One the other day. I was out in Forest Grove and didn't realize that it was formerly the Bank of America, you said?

C.K.: No, it was West One.

M.O'R.: West One, okay. Which was formerly something else, I guess.

C.K.: You see, West One didn't have a farm loan officer up here, but they wanted to do farm business, and then left us a

little bit of a problem. And of course, U.S., we had a couple of bad years, and they didn't know what they wanted to do with us, and finally we told them, "We owe you some money, we'll pay you when we get it. We don't want any other money." And they says, "Okay."

So the next year we had a real good year, we paid them all off and said good-bye. Then West One come along and says, "Gee, we'd like to have you." Well then, West One sold to U.S., and then in that merger, U.S. couldn't take all the banks, so they sold their surplus banks to Pacific One, or Hawaii. So the continuity is not with the farm, it's in the bank.

M.O'R.: I see. I know my own home mortgage has been sold a few times to the various banks, but in my case, of course, it doesn't make much difference, but in your case I can see where it would make a difference. You don't have that continuing relationship. What kind of debts does a farm your size carry, on the average?

C.K.: Quarter of a million dollars.

M.O'R.: That's a substantial little piece of money.

[End of Tape 8, Side 1]

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Tape 8, Side 2

M.O'R.: And your crop mix hasn't changed too much over the years?

C.K.: They've changed, but not too much. And of course the boys are changing all the time, too. You know, with my ten percent ownership and limited partnership, well, I'm not much involved in the management anymore. But I criticize - that's my right, I've been around long enough.

M.O'R.: Do you have any real difference with your partners?

C.K.: Oh yes. We have some differences. This year they're planting practically all cover crop and no wheat.

M.O'R.: And you think that's a mistake?

C.K.: Well, it means that they have to plant too much sweet corn, and I don't believe there's any money in sweet corn. I never raised much sweet corn in my day. I'd raise maybe 20 or 30 acres. Of course, they're clear up to 80 acres, so that stopped them. I always used it for a rotation on the bottom ground where I couldn't raise wheat, and I always raised wheat on the up ground where I could rotate it. Because wheat was a crop that I could handle, I could do the work, but it wouldn't interfere with the row crops. And I concentrated on the row crops, and that was my crops.

M.O'R.: And you think they're a little more profitable than the ...

C.K.: Oh yes. They're a lot more profitable. So that's where I have my differences with the boys right at the moment. They aren't concentrating enough on the profitable stuff, and screwing around with this non-producing stuff.

M.O'R.: What's their defense? What do they argue?

C.K.: They don't.

M.O'R.: They know better than to argue with the old man?

C.K.: Yeah.

M.O'R.: Okay. Well, you've done a good job of describing your farming operations. Is there any other aspect of it that we haven't talked about that we might spend a minute or two on?

C.K.: Well, as far as good wholesome food - and that's what our job is now, is producing good wholesome clean food, healthy food - that's really what our effort is to do. It is not to just produce something that we can get paid for. It is something that's healthy and people can feel confident to eat it. It's not going to affect them healthwise or anything like that.

All the pesticides we use is recommended by a consultant, and that's his specialty job. The processor has their field men and they have their recommendations that we can use. And our consultant, his recommendations are within the processor's recommendations. Everything is written and recorded and the pertinent information is kept, and that information is turned in with the first load that's delivered to the processor. The processor won't allow us to dump that load unless that information is with it. And so, the regulatory people, if they want to make a pesticide check of that load, they can go right to that and they can tell just exactly what they need to check for. There's such a wide variety of pesticides that if they had to shoot for trying to identify a pesticide without any knowledge ahead of time of what might have been used, well, it's very hard to hit. And so they know what to look for and whether there's a residue. And you know, the only thing wrong with the reporting thing is that if you do it wrong, you don't record it that way.

M.O'R.: So sometimes they might not know what to look for, in other words.

C.K.: They would probably know what to look for, but the volume that was used, you can always screw up a tank of pesticide. And if you get double the amount on, you aren't going to write it down. You're going to write down that you put it on, but you're going to write it down according to the label. That's the only fallacy in it. But it's really a pretty good system, and the processor and the grower both make an effort to produce good healthy food.

M.O'R.: And is that part of the joy of farming for you?

C.K.: That's the part that challenges, yes.

M.O'R.: You mentioned a lot off tape about your own lifestyle and about how you live off the land.

C.K.: Well, I've got proof that - I like to farm, that I can transfer that feeling to a lot of other people, because I got three sons that are farmers, and if that isn't proof that I didn't do a good job of showing them how to farm, I don't know what other proof there is.

M.O'R.: And you eat, yourself, off of your own farm. You've put up a little bit of everything you grow here.

C.K.: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Most of the time we don't put up any corn because we can get it from the processor so cheap. And the same thing with beans. We like beans out of a can, tin can. Gotta have the taste of tin with it.

M.O'R.: Do you have a direct line to wholesale prices from the processor, then, is that how that works?

C.K.: No, we could buy cheaper out of the store on sale prices.

M.O'R.: Than you can from the processor? I guess that has to do with the way things are marketed at the time.

C.K.: Yes.

M.O'R.: Okay. Well, thanks a lot, Cal, for describing your farming operations for me today. And I guess we can call it a day with that. And thank you very much.

[End of Tape 8, Side 2]