

CAL KRAHMER

September 5, 1996

Tape 2, Side 1

M.O'R.: This is Michael O'Rourke interviewing Cal Krahmer on September 5th, 1996. And you said you had three alternatives. What were the three alternatives again?

C.K.: One was staying as a dairy and getting a lot bigger, or going into hog production and build a setup so we could produce a lot of hogs.

M.O'R.: And you said you knew what that was all about?

C.K.: I thought I knew how to do that job. Or go into row crops, and row crops was the easiest the get into. It took the less money. And so I opted to go that way. Had a couple of good field men. One was Bob Schlegel that helped me, and Flaberland. And we went into strawberries and chehelem berries and evergreen blackberries, and then a few years later I went into beans and some of those kinds of things.

Of course at the same time, well, I never borrowed money from the bank and it was going to take some money, and so I went to the bank and borrowed some money. Had quite a time trying to get a credit rating, but I did get one, but one of the stipulations was that we keep a good bookkeeping system. And we had been messing around with a computer program that was on a mainframe, and so the bank required that we stay with that computer system for our bookkeeping. And so this place has been - the bookkeeping on this place has been on a computer since 1964, somewheres in there. And then when the IBM XT home computer came out, well, it had enough capacity to handle this bookkeeping system. So we were then the guinea pigs for three years for the development of the computer

program that we're on now and that is being sold by Doanes throughout the United States and Canada and Mexico.

M.O'R.: Sold by Doanes, you said?

C.K.: Yes.

M.O'R.: And that's the name of the company that developed the software?

C.K.: Doanes is a well-known company in agriculture for book-keeping and a whole lot of other different kinds of services. They bought the system after it was developed. It was developed here in Beaverton. Bob Oling from Salem was really the original person with it, and he still has his fingers in it a little bit, but he's of an age now that he doesn't want to do that.

M.O'R.: He had a business in Beaverton for computers?

C.K.: It was in Salem. When we went to the home computer, then he formed a company and he brought two programmers in from Indiana, a man and a wife, that developed that program. And what's nice about it for us is that if we have a problem we get on the telephone and call Beaverton, and you know, those that bought the system in New York have to call Beaverton.

M.O'R.: How was the guinea pig experience? Did you have any problems or did it all go pretty smoothly?

C.K.: Oh yes. Sally was the bookkeeper and she learned to use the computer, and she had no previous outside training whatsoever. All of her training was strictly bookkeeping. So she learned a lot, but you know, you try to clean the computer up at the end of the year and start over for the new year, and some of those things got to be real buggers for us at times. We finally made it, but you know, we had lots of problems.

Sometimes they had a bug and we were the first to discover it, and so then they'd have to go back and redo their program and make corrections. We know what corrections in programs are real well.

And you know, those disks that come in the mail quite often, here's a change you gotta make. But the first year was strictly a labor part of the program, and the next year was the general business part of it, and the third year was the enterprising.

M.O'R.: So the first year it had just kept track of your employment records essentially?

C.K.: Right. And of course we kind of set the standards for the program. They wanted to know what we'd wanted for a program. Well, we wanted a program that could handle, you know, 200 kids. We wanted a program that if we changed the price of picking at noon that the computer could handle it. And we wanted a program that could handle piecework, hour work, both. So we really put some pressure on those programmers that tried to develop it. And of course, we wanted it so that when we pressed the buttons, pretty much automatically the parts, your social security and all that stuff would just come across automatically, do deductions automatically, so we didn't have to spend a lot of time at it. And so it was a challenge.

M.O'R.: But you got it all worked out after a while.

C.K.: Oh, yes. Yes. We've got it. We're real pleased with it.

M.O'R.: I assume that as guinea pigs, you didn't have to invest a lot of money financially in this in those first years, is that right?

C.K.: We didn't pay it to those people, but there was an investment.

M.O'R.: You say that you sort of made a lot of input in terms of the kinds of needs you had for that computer, but I assume that those would be needs that any small farmer would have, is that right?

C.K.: A row cropper.

M.O'R.: A row cropper. Okay.

C.K.: See, that program is one like Malenskis are using now with their plan over there, and they've developed that program not just for what we need, but they've got one for them that takes care of all the inventory, and when they take stuff out, well, it deducts it from the inventory and does all their special needs, too.

M.O'R.: Backing up just a little to when you took over the place from your dad and you farmed together that first year, was one of the reasons that you decided that you needed to take over on your own because you wanted to try out some of these new approaches and new ideas? Was that part of the motivation? Or why did you feel that he to leave?

C.K.: There just wasn't enough income. In the first year I took over, I bought the farm, I paid too much money for it. The gross income that first year was \$8,000, and I had to feed 35 cows and a family of five.

M.O'R.: On \$ 8,000, huh? Even back then, that was probably a challenge.

C.K.: That was. But you know, my dad didn't owe any money. He didn't pay no interest, and he kept the taxes up, and his expenses were not very great. But someone that was buying the place, you know, those expenses, the fixed expenses, were double what he was at. There's only one way to buy a farm and that is you don't look at the land, but you look at the operation and how much money you can make. And that's how business looks at a business when they buy. It's not what the investment was that's sitting there but how much money it'll make, what's the net?

M.O'R.: Can you service the debt with the income?

C.K.: Yes. Those are things you learn later on.

M.O'R.: You had decided to expand the farm somewhat. In fact, you went from, what, 22 head or something up to 35 head of cows?

C.K.: Yeah, I packed a cow in every place I could put one. Well, we went to a shed style setup also, where the cows were loose and night and during the day. So I was able to use some of the outside buildings that hadn't been used before.

M.O'R.: You said to begin with, you had kept up the relationship with the dairy here in Forest Grove was it?

C.K.: Yes, and then I changed. I had Guernseys and I had an opportunity to go into Portland to an all-Guernsey organization that shipped and sold all-Guernsey milk. I think we were with Mayflower, the co-op first, from Geitan's to the co-op and then to the all-Guernsey deal. There was a little more money in the all-Guernsey thing.

M.O'R.: Is Guernsey milk - does it have better quality?

C.K.: I've been out of it so long that I'm not sure I even want to get involved in that one. It's a loyalty thing.

M.O'R.: I see.

C.K.: Go talk to Pete Jansen, he'll tell you how good it is.

M.O'R.: Okay. Now, when you made the decision to switch to row crops, did that then change the irrigation demand that you had here?

C.K.: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. You couldn't make near as many mistakes.

M.O'R.: And did you have sufficient water or rights to sufficient water?

C.K.: No. No. There was one time I was raising cucumbers. I had cucumbers in this field right by this house, and they went five weeks without water, and that's too long for cucumbers. So we were really short on water.

M.O'R.: Did you lose that crop, then?

C.K.: It was very short. So when they started promoting the development of the Hagg Lake and that, well, I participated in that and supported it from the very beginning.

Now it began technically, I believe, in 1935 to develop the river for irrigation, but it never really got going until after World War II. I think the dam got in in 1974. So in that late '60s, early '70s, well, we learned to be very good irrigators. And even the State of Oregon now, the water resources people, they don't even want to discuss how much water we use to irrigate our crops because everybody is so darned careful that they don't want you to irrigate.

M.O'R.: And so where would you get your water in those years? Still from the river?

C.K.: Still from the river. There were a few wells that had been developed, but we don't have a lot of wells in this county.

M.O'R.: Did you have a right then to water from the river at that point?

C.K.: I got my first water right in '57. And of course this bottom one has this - I think it's a '32 or '32 water right. But you know, when the river's dry, it don't make any difference how good your water right is.

M.O'R.: If there's no water, there's no water, right?

C.K.: Yep.

M.O'R.: How did you get the right in '57? Was that difficult?

C.K.: No, it wasn't. It was a matter of getting an engineer and meeting the requirements of the Water Resources Department for your permit. And I did that, and eventually it was certified.

M.O'R.: Back in those days, or maybe even earlier than this time, I guess there were a lot of farmers that I believe just would

take what they needed from the river without necessarily paying too much attention to regulations. I mean, wasn't there sort of a laissez faire attitude towards water on the Tualatin back before it became a real scarce commodity?

C.K.: I don't know a lot about somebody stealing water and irrigating what he wasn't supposed to. I do know that in those 1948 and 1942 water rights that there was kind of a standard volume that was approved, and the law now is that about 6/10ths of a cubic foot per minute per acre. No, it's six gallons - I don't know. Something like that. But at that time they were talking about a cubic foot or two or three cubic foot per acre, you know. There was a big volume that their permits would allow.

Of course, as they expanded they went on to new acres and some of them didn't apply for those new acres of permit, but they weren't exceeding the volume of their old permit. Now, my '57 right, I was given the opportunity to develop at that bigger amount, but I didn't, and the certificate was only approved for the amount that my pump would pump in the equipment I had to distribute, which was a lot less than those original permits.

M.O'R.: I see. It's something probably that didn't work out too well a few years after that.

C.K.: Well, I wish that I had developed it further than I did at that time.

M.O'R.: You just touched on it briefly when we were talking earlier about the problem that was beginning to build on the Tualatin in terms of water quality, you even mentioned that there was some question about irrigating crops with that water, and you said that there was a real problem with all the outfalls on the river. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

C.K.: Well, I knew that we didn't irrigate Saturday and Sunday because Forest Grove held their raw sewage till Friday night

and then dumped it. And it took till Sunday afternoon for it to get by here.

M.O'R.: You could actually see it in the river?

C.K.: Oh, yes. There was no doubt about it.

M.O'R.: How did it affect the river?

C.K.: Oh, it'd give it flow.

M.O'R.: So it was the fact that there was actually some water there.

C.K.: Yeah. It was the fact that there was something there you could pump. Otherwise there wasn't. And so you had a choice of what you wanted to do. Of course, the old Water Commission put a stop to that.

M.O'R.: Put a stop to what?

C.K.: To dumping. Then they started treating it tertiary and we got a better quality of water and they dumped in on a continuous basis. And those below Hillsboro, those irrigators really didn't run out of water, even in those short years. A little bit but not too bad.

M.O'R.: And that was because of the Hillsboro plant?

C.K.: Because of the Hillsboro, and like the Tualatin Golf Course down at Tualatin, it's never run out down there. But where Lake Oswego put that dam in every spring and they back the water all the way up to Farmington, and they've always had water.

M.O'R.: From Farmington on down?

C.K.: Yes. And there isn't that many acres to irrigate down there.

M.O'R.: There were a lot of other outfalls, I guess, besides Forest Grove?

C.K.: Oh, yes.

M.O'R.: Small and big?



C.K.: Yes. Well, Cornelius had their own and Hillsboro, and then down the river of course Tigard and all those others too.

M.O'R.: Besides the increased flows when they'd open the gates at Forest Grove, did you see other signs on the river, like algae growth or ...

C.K.: We don't have algae growth up here because we've got enough fall in the river it keeps it moving.

M.O'R.: So it moves a bit faster up here.

C.K.: Right. Where it stops moving too fast is at Dairy Creek, and if you float the river from here down to the Jackson Bottom, just before you come to Dairy Creek you get into quite a ride, and it's - I don't know I would guess a two- or three-foot fall right at that point right there. But from then on it really slows down, and part of it is that rock outfall there at Farmington that blocks it, and so there's a natural dam there that kind of backs it up into Jackson Bottom.

If you get real involved in the geology of the Tualatin River, it's kind of understandable about Jackson Bottom and some of these other places because of the terrain. Like Jackson Bottom, you've got Dairy Creek coming in there with a lot of silt, and a naturally big place to take on a lot of floodwater, but at Farmington is that natural dam. So it holds all the water back there, but then below Farmington it doesn't flow all that bad, although the people down there that I've talked to say there's some natural holes down there that are 20 feet deep, and that's well below the line that really flows, you know, and so those are just stagnant holes in the river down there. But up here we've always had quite a bit of flow and there's never any water held back.

M.O'R.: So algae's not a problem.

C.K.: No. As long as you got moving water you don't have much algae.

M.O'R.: Any other signs of the high nutrient content of the water up here?

C.K.: Not really.

M.O'R.: Not really. So it's just knowing that Forest Grove is dumping the sewage in it might cause you problems.

C.K.: Yes. And of course, I've been so involved through kind of the conservation district with the water quality problem, being as I was on the conservation district board for twenty years. We got real involved in the water quality because it has the responsibility to agriculture.

M.O'R.: Now I suppose individual farms too have their own impact on the river, depending upon how people took care of their waste and the kind of farming they did. Can you tell me anything about the way practices have changed from, say, the early days when there weren't really any restrictions on a farm to what you have to worry about now?

C.K.: There's a few changes, but boy, it's tough. There's some of us that were aware of it. We haven't used a plough in this place, well a couple times in the last 15, 20 years. We've gone to a chisel plough. Been leaving our stubble standing over the winter and we cover-cropped. And you know, the chisel plough has come on.

M.O'R.: And what's the advantage of the chisel plough?

C.K.: Well, it leaves most of the trash on top of the soil, and most of the row croppers have chisel-ploughing. And some of the wheat people or general farm people are starting to now also. But you know, to farm through trash is a challenge, and that's what you end up doing.

M.O'R.: So it leaves a lot of this vegetable matter, stubble, et cetera, just chopped up on the top?

C.K.: Right. Sometimes it's not too chopped up. But we've learned to do some things that let us direct-seed our broccoli and

some of those things even though we don't plough. Of course with 120,000 seeds to the acre and direct seed in plant to population, well that takes quite a planter because you're asking that planter to pick up one single seed and drop it. And broccoli you drop it six to eight inches. And then that little seed you want at about a quarter, three-eighths of an inch under the soil and no further and no less, and then you've got all this trash.

So those are the challenges that we've accepted and have done a pretty good job of meeting. We've discovered that cover crops and floodground is very beneficial. The Tualatin River just naturally flows to a lot of sediment, and I find it comes from the forest lands, and of course the foresters say it's all from agriculture. Anyhow, with a cover crop we can collect twice to three times as much of that sediment in our bottom ground as you can without it. And so, you know, our bottom grounds most of them are highly organic, and so they actually go down in elevation because of the organic deterioration when you farm it.

M.O'R.: When you say bottom ground you mean the lower areas on the floodlands?

C.K.: The floodlands. So with the row crops we actually were able to maintain our elevation in our lower flood plain rather than lose it.

M.O'R.: And how would you lose it, due to erosion?

C.K.: No, to the deterioration.

M.O'R.: I see. The organic process. Let me pause to get one more word here on the tape. Well, I guess we're getting up to our quitting time here, but I want to thank you for a good start on this interview, Cal, and we'll continue it. It's a great story.

C.K.: Okay.

[End of Tape 2, Side 1]