

## TRANSCRIPT OF AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

RALPH DELGADO

INTERVIEWER: GRANT MOOSBRUGGER

This interview was conducted as part of a series on the Mexican American in Minnesota.

Ralph Delgado, along with his older brother, Ray Jr., and his younger brother, Francis, runs a 900 acre potatoe farm operation. One of the largest in the southern part of the state. The Delgado brothers and their father, Raymond Sr., began buying land in 1953. They have expanded their operation to include cleaning, processing, and shipping their own potatoes.

Ralph Delgado, discusses the farm, his own hobbies and interests, his family's education, discrimination, and gives advice to future generations.

This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview edited to aid in clarity and ease of comprehension for the reader. The original tape recording is available in the Audio-Visual Library of the Minnesota Historical Society.

INTERVIEW WITH RALPH DELGADO

July 26, 1976

Moosbrugger: This is Grant Moosbrugger, interviewing Mr. Ralph Delgado in Maple Island, Minnesota, July 26, 1976, for the Minnesota Historical Society. Do I have your permission to take an interview from you?

Delgado: Yes, you do.

Moosbrugger: Can you tell us, Mr. Delgado, a little bit about your agricultural operation here, in Maple Island; a brief history, how you got started in the business, and how it's growing?

Delgado: We purchased our first land in 1953. Prior to that, we worked for other people. We were raising sugar beets and potatoes, at that time. In 1959, we quit the sugar beets, because they went to different equipment. With the same equipment, we could go to more potatoes. We went into potatoes and each year, we would buy more land. It kept getting larger, we now raise four hundred acres of potatoes. We own around seven-hundred acres, and we also rent another two-hundred acres. Potatoes are our main money-maker. We have corn, beans, and wheat as a rotation.

Moosbrugger: You're in this business with your two brothers? And until recently, your father?

Delgado: Right. My father passed away February ninth, a year ago. There are three of us brothers: Ray Junior, who's the oldest; I'm the middle one; and Francis is the youngest brother. We have our own potatoe washing plant here. The youngest brother does all the office work, as far as buying and selling. My job is the maintenance end of it. My oldest brother is primarily in warehouse and fertilizer application. I do the potatoe and corn planting. Beans are planted the same time as the potatoes. The oldest brother has to plant potatoes at that time. We overlap into each other's jobs. If one gets done, we help each other out. Then we have two hired men who are working year round.

Moosbrugger: How many people do you have working for you, from time to time?

Delgado: Throughout the summer, we handle it ourselves. In the spring, we take on about five or six other people at cutting time. At harvest time, we take on about eight or ten people, depending on the dirt situation. In the different fields, as pertaining to lumps, dirt, trash, etc., you have to throw some of it out before it gets in the warehouse.

Moosbrugger: Do you and your brothers get to know the whole phase of the jobs?

Delgado: Right. We overlap. Then we talk back and forth. No one person makes a major decision. Small decisions are made on the spur of the moment. Any major decisions are always talked among the three of us. We have been incorporated for about three years. We're still going through what I call legal hassles. It's part of the program to get incorporated, squared away, and to set it up on a bi-sell agreement. If one would happen to become disabled, or killed, rather than paying a lawyer a bunch of money to settle it, we're settling it for him.

Moosbrugger: I noticed, as I drove up here, a plane took off on one of your roads. Do you hire contractors to do work and jobs for you for the farm operation?

Delgado: Right. I think it was about eight or nine years ago, we had a real wet season. We couldn't get out with the ground rake to spray. So we heard of a gentleman from Windom, his name is Jim Nelson. We were the first ones to bring an airplane into Hollandale to do crop spraying. Now there are two other planes in the area. Jim has sprayed for us all these years. We're very satisfied with his work. He keeps his plane down here. We have a man living here that watches it all the time, so that the plane won't be in danger of vandalism.

Moosbrugger: You have quite a bit of machinery. You showed me a fascinating machine. Do you want to tell us a little about that?

Delgado: Yes. We have a four year old potatoe harvester. It is the second one

Delgado: made in the world. The other one is a demonstrator they had out for about three years. It's up in Wolahala, North Dakota. With our operation, it was quite expensive. We thought we could see fit, by gaining the amount of acres. We more than doubled our acres per day, with this four-roll. It works out really well on a light yield, because you can lead that much faster. We are very pleased with it. We're always open to any new improvements that can help better our operation, improve the yields, and bring us more income with less hours.

Moosbrugger: Have you stayed just in the farming aspect, or do you have any other operations of your business?

Delgado: They abandoned us with the railroad, so we've purchased a short line of it, so far. I think we're dealing on another length of line, right now. By the time we're done, we're going to have somewhat over one-hundred miles of track. We do have our own engine now. They allow us to pull off the main line. They'll pick up the cars from there, and continue on.

Moosbrugger: So you have gotten into the shipping part too?

Delgado: Right. The trucks aren't that reliable, with the rail-cars. The rail cars will be here, we can load them at other times. We had to wait as long as three days for a particular truck. We've had to set the load on the floor, and it's double handling and double labor. We just try to cut the corners whenever we can.

Moosbrugger: Do you have any other hobbies or interests? As I drove by, I noticed quite a set-up, as far as dog-kennels go.

Delgado: Well, the wife and I both like showing dogs. We've traveled possibly five or six thousand miles each year. We fly to the National Show every year. We both like it. To us, it's very interesting. Then we have a boarding-kennel, also. We like that too. We've had a lot of compliments on it. It gives us a little more income. It seems like a guy never has too much

Delgado: income. We both enjoy it. We get away from the farm and get our mind off of our everyday, regular duties. It gives us a little relaxation.

Moosbrugger: What breed do you deal in?

Delgado: We deal in German Shepards. We have predominantly the Lance-lines, which are out of Lance of Fran Jo. He is the German Shepard that has produced the best progeny point-wise, and he is the wisest of any German Shepard in history. We like that style and type of dog. Although there are different blood-lines, we prefer this Lance-line.

Moosbrugger: Do you ever get into any other interests? We were talking a little bit about antiques. Do you ever run into any antiques in this part of the woods?

Delgado: Right, we do a little monkeying around with a few antiques and coins. We were out in California. We picked up a matching pair of finger lamps, that had no mold marks, whatsoever. They were hand-blown, without any molds. They were stamped, "1871". We brought back a wooden coal-hod, hand carved, from England, sawed out of Oak. This is, to us, the most interesting stuff that we've come across. We like to dabble in it. We are adding a room on to the house, now. We plan to put strictly antiques into this room, as a type of a hobby. I have a favorite, those finger-lamps, I think the official name for them is a night-lamp, as a main collecting item.

Moosbrugger: So there are plenty of things to occupy a person's interests outside of big cities?

Delgado: Right. We are a couple of "hay-shakers," anyway. This is something we like to do.

Moosbrugger: Fun is where you find it!

Delgado: Right. We both enjoy it. Now we have a little boy named Dan. He also likes dogs. He is only eighteen months old. We hope that he will continue

Delgado: to like dogs. We'll try to guide him in the right direction, if we can.

Moosbrugger: Were you born and raised right here?

Delgado: Yes, all three of us. Well, I have an older sister, too. Her name is Delores. My sister and Ray Junior, were born in the same house. Francis and I were both quite close together. So we were all born and raised here in Hollandale.

Moosbrugger: What year was Ray Junion born?

Delgado: He was born in 1935; I was born in 1937; and Francis was born in 1939. We are all quite close together. My older sister was born two years before my oldest brother, whatever year that was.

Moosbrugger: 1933.

Delgado: Yes, 1933.

Moosbrugger: Roughly, what year did your father come to Hollandale?

Delgado: He came back and forth, as a migrant, from Omaha. He went back and forth a few times. I think it was 1928, when they decided to stay here. He got married, it must have been in 1931 or 1932. From then on, he stayed. My mother was from Wells, Minnesota. That's all I know about that.

Moosbrugger: Was your father's personal inclination towards farming? Did he want to settle down and get his own farm?

Delgado: He was what you call a stoop-laborer. It must have been about 1948 when we started farming, just renting land at that time. In 1946, he had five or six acres of onions that he shared with another fellow. That's basically how he got his start in farming.

Moosbrugger: Did he have a lot of definite ideas and input into the present day operation before he passed away? Or was it mostly your brothers and you, who took the big interest in getting a large operation going?

Delgado: Well, no, it was him. He always kept stating that he never realized it would get this large. He didn't realize that we were going to stay home

Delgado: and farm. After he realized it, we were all hanging around the farm because we liked it. We kept buying more acres of land, whenever we could. In the past two weeks, we purchased another forty acres. That puts us in the seven hundred acre area, as far as owning land, plus, the cost of the two hundred acres which we rent.

Moosbrugger: So your plans for the future are to keep the operation going strong, and adding on when and where it's possible?

Delgado: Right. We're quite selective on the land we buy. There's quite a few different pieces that come up, but we're not really interested in that type of ground. We are mainly interest in potatoe ground. Whenever some of that comes up, we like to have first chance at it. We don't always get it, of course. We are in there putting in the highest bid, as far as we can see fit.

Moosbrugger: Where did you go to school? Right here in Hollandale, or did you travel by school bus?

Delgado: When we were younger, first through fourth grade, I went to Maple Island. The school is now closed. From fifth to eighth grade, we went to Hollandale. For Senior High School, we went to Albert Lea. All four of us went through that same grade procedure.

Moosbrugger: How was it growing up, being Mexican American? Did you feel any discrimination?

Delgado: When we were younger, in the lower grades, like first to eighth grade, we felt a lot of discrimination. There was definite discrimination there. We were just laborers then, also we were quite young, so we didn't voice our opinion too much. Now we have established ourselves. We voice our opinion, sometimes too often. I guess a lot of us do voice our opinion, it's one of the things that happens as time goes by. As we went to high school, it seemed like there was a great deal of difference, there was a

Delgado: different type of people. They weren't clannish, like the people in Hollandale. Hollandale was, at that time, a predominantly Dutch settlement. They were quite clannish. When we went to high school, it was a completely different story.

Moosbrugger: Did you participate in athletics in high school?

Delgado: Yes. I was the most outstanding of the boys. I went to state wrestling three years in a row. My senior year, I was runner-up in the state. I got beat two to one. Then I was co-captain for football that year, and co-captain for wrestling. I was elected "Outstanding Wrestler of the Year", my senior year. I got six letters. I was only out for two sports. In the spring, I had to work, so I wasn't able to go out for track, which I don't regret. A guy had to look forward to his future, also, as far as making a living. I'm well satisfied with the choices we've made.

Moosbrugger: Do you see yourself staying in this area and continuing this kind of work?

Delgado: Right. Now each one of us has a son, we're not going to force them into being part of the farm. If they want to, it will be done. It's being set up that way now, so we can make changes, although, one is eight or nine years older than the other two, which is not that big of a deal.

Moosbrugger: At least they'll have the opportunity if they want it. It will be here for them. When you stop and think that your great-grandchildren might be listening to this recording, do you have any personal philosophy; what has made life good for you? Obviously, it has been good for you. Just give us a general philosophy and a tip on how it might be good for your grandchildren or great-grandchildren.

Delgado: Well, we used to have a sign in the wrestling room. I don't think I'll ever forget it. The sign went, "The harder I work, the more luck I seem to have".

Moosbrugger: "The harder I work, the more luck I seem to have". True.

Delgado: I have been out of school a while. We have our twentieth reunion this year. That sign was in there when I was a freshman in high school. It will be twenty-four years ago. It stuck with me. I have never forgotten it. I have told a couple of other business people this little phrase. Once in a while, they would mention it in passing in conversation. It's very short, just a few words, but it says a lot. This is my philosophy.

Moosbrugger: Okay. Thank you very much.

Delgado: Okay.

Mexican-American Oral History Project  
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