

**Interview with Gerald Hagaman**

**Interviewed by Margaret Robertson  
Minnesota Historical Society**

**Interviewed on November 22, 1989  
at the office of the Minnesota Farm Bureau, St. Paul, Minnesota**

**MR:** I'd like to start by asking about your background.

**GH:** I've been with the Farm Bureau organization for thirty-six years. I began in Illinois with the Illinois Farm Bureau, spending twenty years there working in areas of membership, legislative affairs, and various other assignments. I then worked with the American Farm Bureau Federation, which is our national organization, for five years. I served as an area field service director for six to ten states and then later served with the American Farm Bureau as a coordinator of natural and environmental resources, dealing especially in water, federal land policies, and depredation problems. Since 1978, I've been administrator of the Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation, and in that area I oversee the activities of the federation in Minnesota. My background is that of a dairy farm in Illinois, where I spent most of my youth. Following my education and my stint in the Army, I came to the Farm Bureau organization.

**MR:** Growing up, were you always interested in agriculture?

**GH:** I've been in agriculture all my life, actually.

**MR:** And you knew that was the career you wanted?

**GH:** Well, it was agriculture as--I suppose--the prime area. There were opportunities, of course, to look at other things. The military was a very good experience. However, agriculture seemed to be a better long-range possibility for me.

**MR:** What attracted you about working with the Farm Bureau?

**GH:** The Farm Bureau, in those early days, of course, worked very closely with the extension service. What attracted me to both of those entities was the aspect of dealing with the problems of farmers, helping them achieve greater opportunities for enhanced income, enhanced freedom of operation, and enhanced technology. It seemed to me to be an area that had great potential for the future.

**MR:** When you first began to work with the Farm Bureau, were you working with the extension service?

**GH:** In those days, the extension service and the Farm Bureau were actually housed together, and the Farm Bureau provided a great deal of the support for extension. With the passage of Memorandum 1368 in 1954, the extension service could not longer accept funds for rent or anything else from private organizations of farmers. With that, it became necessary for both of the entities involved to head their separate ways. Though we still worked very closely together, it was necessary to have some changes over what had prevailed over the past thirty or forty years.

**MR:** I have spoken with an extension agent who began his career in Illinois and who also commented on this split. Was this true of the Minnesota experience as well?

**GH:** Minnesota was a little less fortunate than other states. In Illinois, there was a very simple transition. The Illinois Farm Bureau was able to continue its relationship to contributions to the University of Illinois through the extension councils. In turn, the money was funneled back to the extension service representatives, so the Farm Bureau was able to maintain that close relationship.

In Minnesota, because of the great number of farm organizations that exist--which isn't the case in other states--there was not that possibility, because many of the other organizations felt that it was not fair for one organization to have the advantage, if you will, of that close relationship to the extension service. They probably felt that it hindered their relationships with farmers and so on because of one organization having that much closer a relationship with the extension service.

At that time, the extension service and the Farm Bureau in Minnesota suffered a great deal. The extension service lost the Farm Bureau support, and the Farm Bureau lost a lot of members because it was not able to maintain that which had attracted many people--the educational opportunities offered through the extension service. At that time, the Minnesota Farm Bureau had some 72,000 members, and the result was that immediately the membership dropped to less than half of that figure. We've been recovering ever since.

**MR:** What period of time are you referring to?

**GH:** The period of time would have been from 1954, to be exact, when the memorandum came out, to a period of probably nine years, during which time the Farm Bureau membership in Minnesota dropped to a low of 19,000 members. In the ensuing years, we've built back up to nearly 35,000 members, but it had a devastating effect on both the extension service and upon the Farm Bureau. Many of the other organizations which really wanted the access did not have the financial capability of making up that which the Farm Bureau had previously contributed toward the extension service operations.

**MR:** I'm interested that you served as an environmental resources coordinator. Clearly, environmental issues and agricultural issues have become very much tied in recent years. Tell me a little bit about that experience.

**GH:** Well, the area that became of paramount concern was water use--who had the rights to the water? My assigned area was in the seventeen contiguous western states. In those states, there were a great deal of Indian water claims and a great deal of conflict between the federal lands and the private lands through which water flowed. A lot of Indian treaties had some effect over the water. The federal government would not quantify their needs, to the degree that through the priority water system there was always a question of who had the rights to the water. The result of this was that many bodies of water, such as the Colorado River, were over-appropriated in many places. By the time these waters got to Mexico, not only were they over-appropriated, they were greatly contaminated because of irrigation and nitrates in the water and many other things.

So the Farm Bureau was involved in the adjudication of claims. We were involved in the determination of who, in fact, had contaminated the water, and in finding ways to overcome those problems and to do justice to all the people concerned. Federal land problems again became a conflict between environmental groups who were concerned about the original pristine condition of federal lands--including woodlands--as opposed to those who felt that there should be management of those lands in order to preserve them in a way that wouldn't affect their ability to endure over the years.

So it became important to find ways that we could co-exist, if you will, with those entities that were arguing over the same property. The federal land property, you see, amounted to some 172,000 acres over the western part of the United States. Much of that had been used for grazing purposes and all that sort of thing. The environmental groups said that use disturbed the land. Of course, we felt that multiple use actually enhanced the land. Many of the techniques that had been used over the years to recondition the land had contributed to an enhancement, rather than a destruction. So it became quite an issue of concern.

I think it would be fair to say, too, that there were a lot of questions arising out of the 1972 Clean Water Act which defined point sources of pollution, non-point sources of pollution, and which also determined the use of water dependent upon navigation. Point source was not a problem, because that was the water coming out of pipes from industrial uses. Non-point sources was a serious problem, because agriculture was involved in water pollution through water flowing through agricultural land and through feed-lot contribution. We were defensive those first years, because we didn't feel we were totally contributing to the problem. Obviously, we felt there was over-reaction on the part of environmental groups, which in many cases was true.

But finally, we have arrived at the point where we are not worrying about being defensive. We are worrying about making sure that our house is clean and that we are taking all the precautions we can to ensure that we're not contributing to the pollution of the waters of this country. That includes not only the priority waters, but the waters in the eastern half of the United States where the riparian rights are in effect.

**MR:** There's a perception by some that environmentalists and agriculturalists are at diametric poles from each other. What's your opinion about that?

**GH:** If I might draw an analogy--of 100% of the people, I would say ten percent probably are very intent on saying that agriculture is a problem. Ten percent are on the other side of the coin--within agriculture--and aware of the facts. Then there is a vast group of eighty percent of the people who don't know what's going on. That is the group which is often affected by what seems to be the most emotionally charged issues that come to the forefront.

I think we're working a lot more closely with the environmental groups--let me say the responsible environmental groups. There are radical groups on both sides which engage in overkill, but I think that we're working far better with the responsible groups to determine what is reasonable--what are reasonable amounts of foreign elements in water, what are tolerable amounts, and so on. I don't think we're diametrically opposed with responsible environmental groups. However, often those who are more militant put the programs out of proportion to the actual concerns.

**MR:** One issue that has become very prominent is groundwater contamination. Is that a concern of the Farm Bureau?

**GH:** Very definitely, to the degree that two years ago, we put out a multi-page inventory which asks farmers: What are we doing with our chemicals? How are we applying our chemicals? How are we storing our chemicals? What are we doing with the cans? Where are we putting our fertilizers? What are we doing as far as following the rules? It was a complete inventory of the actual practices on every farm in Minnesota. We distributed over 40,000 of those. That program had a very profound effect in causing farmers to examine their agricultural practices.

We think that we have been successful through the certification of applicators and in getting farmers to carefully read the directions on the chemical containers. We feel that we've been successful in bringing about an awareness that we can pollute if we aren't careful about how we apply the various chemicals. Also, economic factors have caused farmers to realize that they must use good judgment in the application of fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, and so on. I'm convinced that the majority of agricultural people--the majority of farmers--are conscious that they need to ensure that they're not polluting groundwater. And it makes sense, because they drink the same groundwater as everybody

else does. They're probably more conscious of it than perhaps those who aren't as closely affected.

**MR:** Is news like the discovery of atrazine in some wells in southeastern Minnesota, for example, the kind of issue that raises concern?

**GH:** We are concerned in two areas. One, does it exist and is it true? And secondly, is it as serious as the media oftentimes portrays it to be?

I should point out here that our methods of measurement have changed without necessarily the certifiable amounts changing. We used to talk about so many parts per 100; now it's so many parts per 1,000, so many parts per million, per billion. Now we're in the trillions. Often the amount of chemical has not changed, but the minimums have changed to the degree that as our ability to test them in a more finite way has come about. We can ensure that it's a safer situation because the tolerances are way in excess sometimes of what they need to be.

We also need to recognize that research conducted on small animals and research conducted on human consumption can differ greatly--not only because of metabolisms of the various people and creatures involved, but because of the sizes and weights and many other things. I think the media very often has done a disservice by responding to the sensational rather than the factual and the scientific, and very often qualified scientific opinions have been lost in the emotional shuffle.

**MR:** Would one example of this be the recent scare about alar in apples?

**GH:** A very good example. We like to refer to that as the "gospel according to '60 Minutes.'" We think that the "60 Minutes" people did a great injustice, because they overlooked very, very qualified scientific information in the interest of a very limited report from an organization that didn't have the credentials to actually give the information they did. The report of the Natural Resources Defense Council had earlier been disregarded as not being a qualified report, yet "60 Minutes" seized on that report. It was proven later to most everyone's satisfaction that, in fact, the alar situation was not as serious as it had been portrayed to be.

But unfortunately, once one of those scares is unleashed, the action to overcome it is far less successful, because people do react very quickly. And I can understand that. Their children and their families are involved. Certainly, it's a logical experience within a community, but unfortunately based on emotion rather than fact. Of course, the fact was proven later that a person would have had to have eaten some 2,800 pounds of apples to have a negative effect. I can assure you that any child who eats 2,800 pounds of apples is going to get sick.

**MR:** You spoke briefly about the role of education. How important is that in terms of educating the public and educating the farmers?

**GH:** To me, the important job before agriculture in the '90s is going to be educating the public on food safety and on other areas such as animal welfare. Many articles are again, through sensationalism, giving the public some rather unstable information. We are just as interested in food safety as anybody else. We have prided ourselves for years on the production of safe, nutritious, good food. We have not changed those practices. Because of some scare tactics, we find that it becomes even more necessary to reinforce that information to the public. A large part of our activities in the Farm Bureau during the next decade is going to be that of education on food safety.

**MR:** What about the role of education in terms of farmers, in terms of application and so forth?

**GH:** That's very important. We have been working at that and cooperating with government agencies on that for some time. We think that we have come a long way. Naturally, there are going to be offenders, just as there are in any other industry or in any other area. But we think that farmers have become--through, if for no other reason, the economic aspects--more conscious of the amounts of chemicals that they use.

On the other side of the coin, I think that the public needs to understand that a product produced without any chemicals and without any protections will be a less desirable product, too. So we need to achieve a balance between the understanding of the public and the utilization by farmers to the end that both are doing what's in the best interest of all concerned.

**MR:** You also mentioned working with companies that produce herbicides and pesticides. What can be done in that area?

**GH:** We were very concerned several years ago with all of the advertising on television that was taking place in the Twin Cities by the chemical companies, to the degree that we communicated with the chemical companies and said, "You are sending a message that is not a good message. You're telling the world that we're going to apply chemicals without regard to good judgment." Many of the chemical companies responded to that message.

In addition to that, through responsible groups within the chemical industry, we're seeking to achieve understanding and good training for farmers and applicators. For the most part, most chemical companies have been responsive. This is certainly a concern for them, because they have a public image to deal with, too. Rather than for the two sides to sit apart from each other and throw jibes, it's important that we determine what does the public need to know and understand? What do we need to do that assures that we're acting responsibly in relationship to those responsibilities?

**MR:** One issue that's sure to come up in the fight for the 1990 farm bill is this issue of environmental protection. To what extent would you like to see some legislation on that?

**GH:** We think that there is going to be more players in the enactment of the 1990 farm bill than have ever been before. There are going to be animal groups; there are going to be chemical groups; there are going to be environmental groups; there are going to be food safety groups; there are going to be consumer groups; and there are going to be farmers. We recognize the fact that farmers today are a small segment of the population and not a very vocal segment of the population. It is incumbent upon us to work with those people who are responsible to create understanding of what is reasonable and necessary to ensure that all of the segments of the economy are adequately represented and that all are treated justly. The kind of a program that comes out of the 1990 farm bill isn't just in the interest of any one segment, but rather in the interests of the entire economy.

**MR:** One proposal that will undoubtedly be discussed is the requirement that farmers submit a plan regarding their highly erodible land to receive government benefits. What is the Farm Bureau's position on that?

**GH:** Of course, conservation is a very important thing. We've been very involved in both the swampbuster and sodbuster bills in the past. The only thing we want to ensure is that reason becomes the main direction in which we act.

During the swampbuster considerations, we were concerned that there was some rather remote areas that were being protected without any reason behind it. We don't want to infringe upon wildlife or upon public properties and lands, but we don't want farmers to be hamstrung from normal farming practices because of unreasonable constraints by the government in the interest of extreme conservation. For example, farmers have been hampered in the repairing of tiles because of aircraft infrared pictures showing that there was water that would be disturbed. Of course, it was water that would be changed to repair the tile. Well, we think it's more important to determine the history of the problem and the specific things that we're dealing with in individual cases, instead of using a broad-brush approach that's going to infringe upon the freedoms of anyone.

So we're strong on conservation. We think that the highly erodible land must be protected. We think that tons of silt are being lost through erosion, and we've got to take steps to avoid that. We support any reasonable approaches to conservation.

**MR:** A national government foundation recently came out with a study that endorsed low impact sustainable agriculture (LISA). It's a fairly controversial report. What was the Farm Bureau's reaction to that?

**GH:** We're concerned over definition. Low input sustainable agriculture is not necessarily organic farming. To the organic farmer, that's what it means, and to other people, of course, the definitions will vary. We think that it's in the best interest of the farmers, both in the use of chemicals and from the economic standpoint, to try to get efficient as they possibly can in all their practices--so that they can survive economically in the '90s. The margins are not really so great that farmers can be very frivolous in the use of those chemicals. We definitely think that low input sustainable agriculture is going to be very important.

It's rather interesting. As early as the '50s, when a professor at Purdue was talking about low tillage, minimum tillage, and all those sorts of things, people were looking at the subject with jaundiced eyes. It's all coming back now, and it's starting to make sense. More farmers are understanding that we are better off if we use minimum and low tillage. We don't necessarily have to fall plow land that's subject to wind erosion. That approach makes a lot of sense today as people get a little more enlightened as to the use of their land.

**MR:** So is the Bureau supportive of research efforts towards that goal?

**GH:** Oh, by all means. By all means.

**MR:** One area that we're interested in besides conservation is the farm crisis of the 1980s. It appears that a tremendous economic dislocation occurred in agriculture in the state. Can you talk a little bit about that era?

**GH:** Let me say this carefully. Statistics should show there was no greater loss of farms in the '80s than there was in the '70s and the '60s and the '50s. We've been seeing a reduction in the number of farmers since day one, and it's probably fortunate that we did, because everybody can't farm. That isn't to say, however, that there weren't some very serious situations in the '80s that were brought about by lenders, farmers, and all of the people involved. There is no one player that can be blamed for the situation. It's easy to say that the lenders led the farmers astray, but the farmers were also consenting adults. But at the same time, farmers did have the right to rely on the expertise of the lending community, and sometimes the lending community did not use good judgment.

There was an unusually fast increase in the values of property brought about by some boom days prior to that, and there was just as fast a deterioration of the values of farm property. We hope that we have learned a lesson, both in the lending community and in the farming community, that it just isn't in the interest of anybody to over-lend or to over-buy.

The thing we're going to see is that there will not be the booms and the busts in the future that we've experienced over the past number of years. I think that we will see a greater



degree of management practices put into effect by farmers who are going to have a greater knowledge that cash flow is more important necessarily than asset values. Something we have to learn is that most farmers in the '80s had no idea that cash flow was as important as the asset values, because they lived through an era of inflation. All they had had to do was sit there and their assets improved in value. Those days are gone now with the lessening of inflation, so now cash flow becomes very important. I think more farmers are conscious of that. As a result, you're going to see a more stable farm economy than we've seen in the past.

**MR:** To what extent have farmers who have gone through this experience more conservative in their borrowing and expansion?

**GH:** The survivors are. People learned a great deal, and the lenders learned a great deal. I think that given the fact that commodities, for the most part, have not had the great changes in value, people are a little more conservative all the way across the line. We saw some periods where commodity prices rose unnaturally--a case in point is soybeans. I can remember a fellow asking me in the late '60s, "Do you think that \$2.75 soybeans is the time to sell?"

And I thought, "Well, \$2.75 soybeans is a pretty high price."

Needless to say, I was very, very over-conservative in that assumption, because they went a great deal higher. But we haven't seen the fluctuation in the last two or three years, and I think that's to the best interests of all concerned.

**MR:** To what extent do you think commodity prices will remain stable over the years? Or with the GATT [General Agreements on Trade and Tariffs] proposals and so forth, will there be a great change in commodity prices?

**GH:** With the export enhancement program over the past few years, we assumed that we would see a great difference in commodity prices. We have not seen that fluctuation for any number of reasons. Obviously, there are going to be at least two factors that come into play here. What are our trading partners going to do in the EEC [European Economic Community], in the Pacific Rim countries, in the Far East, and so on? What about subsidized agriculture?

One of our goals, for both our trading partners and the United States, is a reduction in the degree of subsidy. If we can bring about some stabilization in the production practices in the various countries due to a reduction in the subsidy programs, we'll see a little better regulated flow of agricultural products. That being the case, I think that we'll get into a fairly predictable pattern, which we haven't been able to do over the past few years because there have been too many unknowns. I have provided a lot of questions on that point, but I didn't provide many answers. [Chuckles]

**MR:** So do you think a more predictable economy will be of greater benefit than an artificially high level of support for commodities?

**GH:** Oh, by all means if we have--as we did back in the '40s--a knowledge of what our trade patterns are going to be. We used to know how many millions of dollars of trade we were going to have. It just dropped to less than half of that now. We've seen varying production patterns in other countries. If we can ever get that to stabilize, naturally the economy will be a lot more predictable. South Americans haven't begun to produce as well as they can, but at the same time, their economy hasn't necessarily stabilized to the degree that they can know what to do as far as their production is concerned. The European Common Market is bound to create a change, because other segments of the European Economic Community are going to begin to wonder why agriculture has that most favored status. I think as a result, you're going to see a lessening of subsidization of agriculture in the EEC, which, in turn, will reduce the level of production to some degree. Perhaps that will take away some of the artificial aspects of the international markets that we've experienced.

**MR:** To what extent does the fact that government spending for agricultural programs has risen tremendously over the years will play into all this--that people are dissatisfied that their tax dollars are going to support an agricultural program that seems to still be in trouble?

**GH:** Well, let me say, first of all, if you take the agricultural budget and compare it to other segments of the federal budget, it's a drop in the bucket. You could wipe out the entire agricultural budget and not have a very big effect on either the gross national product or the federal budget.

Again, it goes back to education. What does it take to support the agricultural plan of this country? Farmers don't want to farm for government--farmers want to operate under the free-enterprise system and they want to let the market be the determining factor. I think there's going to be a trend in the direction of bringing about stabilized markets through providing the market with its normal function. As a result, you'll see a reduction in government programs in most commodities. What the effect will be on the cost to the Department of Agriculture, of course, is negligible, because most of the cost of that is not in the programs, but in the people administering the programs. As you well know, government doesn't ever shrink. Government finds other things to do with people and finds more people to do it. So that becomes a real question mark.

One of the problems that we're dealing with is that we've never quite found a way to treat all commodities alike. We in the Midwest say that we don't want as much support for corn, soybeans, or wheat, but in the south, we support the cotton, rice, tobacco, and even the sugar programs--which are administered a little differently. We have a great variation

of programs. Somewhere along the line, I suppose there's going to have to be some kind of stabilization.

**MR:** It's hard to ask the world economy to change the way they subsidize products if we can't agree on how we subsidize ours.

**GH:** Oh, to be sure. We've operated for years under the politics of equal shares. For example, the politics of equal shares are: do we support dairy at the same rate we support tobacco, where we've reduced acreage on the basis of support? If we were to apply that to dairy cows in Wisconsin, every dairy farmer would be down to a cow and a half. Obviously, that's a rather facetious example, but we don't really prove much by chasing acres. Corn is produced in more parts of the country than ever were before because of diminishing markets for cotton. We've been chasing acres all over the country. We need that stabilization worldwide--not necessarily through a controlled agriculture--but through a market-oriented agriculture.

**MR:** We've been talking quite a bit about national and international issues, which, of course, affect Minnesota farmers. But can you tell me a little bit about your Minnesota membership and the kind of farmers who belong to the Farm Bureau?

**GH:** Of course, being a general farm organization, we have all kinds of farmers. The general farm organization, as opposed to a commodity organization, deals in all aspects of agriculture. We have nearly 35,000 members, and in that membership, we include all types of farming operations. So our programs are necessarily geared to deal with problems which are total problems, not specific problems related to specific commodities--although certainly we cooperate in those areas, too. But we have a broad-perspective type of membership.

**MR:** What are some of the programs of the Minnesota Farm Bureau?

**GH:** Of course, our strongest program is that of our legislative one. We're interested in anything that relates to the profitability of farming or to the freedom of operation in farming. Last year, our big issue was water and water quality. This year, I think one of the strong issues is going to be the use of wetlands. We've also worked on taxes issues to try to bring about equality between our rural and our urban areas. I think it's important that we provide types of programs that are going to sustain small communities that are accessible to farmers. All those issues make it necessary that we be totally state oriented, rather than just worrying about our own small segment, because we can't really separate them anymore.

**MR:** You spoke about wetland legislation becoming important this year. What are your specific goals on that issue?

**GH:** Well, we think that if the government is going to require large changes in farmers' operations through control of wetlands, it's going to have to provide some funding to do it. We're going to ask for reasonable criteria, but there will be other groups that have different ideas. Obviously, the sporting people will have a different viewpoint. We want to come up with something that's fair and equitable to all concerned. We in agriculture don't want to be the fall guy--the only one making any kind of sacrifice in order to provide equality for everybody else.

**MR:** So you would like to see some kind of funding for farmers who have to give up erodible land for wetlands?

**GH:** Well, yes, for farmers who have to make sacrifices in terms of reduction of their farming operation or other significant changes. There ought to be some compensation to cover that cost if it's going to benefit other segments of society.

**MR:** One thing that we've seen in terms of Minnesota agriculture not only is a loss historically of farmers, but also a reduction in population for rural communities. What is the Farm Bureau's perception of that?

**GH:** We're concerned. Farmers need to have a strong local community for not only their purchases, but for the sale on their product. When they have to travel hundreds of miles to get the things that they need to carry on their operations, obviously their profitability is affected. We think that a strong viable community is important from the standpoint of schools and churches and retailing operations--all those things that are important to rural Minnesota, just as they are to urban Minnesota.

**MR:** Another issue that we're very interested in is family farming. It seems that everyone has a different definition of family farming. What is your definition?

**GH:** You're right in saying that it's a very widely interpreted topic. The nostalgic picture of the family farm is a few chickens, a couple of cows, a horse, and so on. Interestingly enough, over ninety percent of agriculture in the United States is family farms--whether they are two acres or 200,000 acres. Family farming can best be described as that type of an agricultural operation which is under the management of a family unit. Probably that would be the most logical criteria. Now, that doesn't take into consideration the land owned by large corporations like Union Pacific, but surprisingly, only three percent of the land in the nation is operated by that type of corporation. Now, many of the family farms are family corporation farms, so you can't necessarily say that incorporation is the dividing line. But any operation in which the family has control and management over the land must be defined as a family farming operation, even though it doesn't fit the nostalgic pattern.

**MR:** That's the type of farming that the Farm Bureau wants to promote?

**GH:** Well, there's a great deal of debate on such things as integrated operations. We don't want to see large commercial enterprises taking over the entire farming operation. We want to maintain some of the historic pattern that allows the family corporation or partnership to maintain their operation and control and not turn it over to industrial interests.

**MR:** But you do think there's a niche for insurance companies and other corporate entities to own farmland?

**GH:** I don't know about owning farmland. I would rather say that if they can provide capital through loans and that sort of thing, leaving the management in the hands of the operators, it's far more desirable. I don't think that we want farming to become a tax loss for every major corporation in the country. We want farmers to farm. So the only place for the dollars of these corporations such as insurance companies and financial institutions is in assisting in the maintainance of viable operations.

**MR:** Minnesota has a so-called corporate farming law that prevents corporations from owning farmland. To what extent has that been effective in Minnesota?

**GH:** Well, that's been all over the map, obviously. I think it can play some very significant roles in keeping large corporations from amassing farmland, but at the same time, it can, in some degree, stifle operations. We introduced legislation a couple of years ago that would have said that nobody could own over ten percent of the operation who wasn't actually involved in the farming operation. Well, this is difficult to legislate when you consider a family operation. Maybe three out of four of the members of the family are in other enterprises, but they want to put their capital into the farming operation. Maybe one brother is a doctor and another is an attorney, and they want to maintain their interest in the farm. Under some restrictive types of legislation, this would be impossible. We don't think that's the intent of those kinds of legislative actions. There needs to be some latitude that recognizes the traditional interest of total family operations for some of these farm operations.

**MR:** So you see the law as needing more fine-tuning rather than an extensive change?

**GH:** I would suspect that's right. You can't legislate to the degree of crossing all the "t's" and dotting all the "i's." I think there has to be some latitude that recognizes the inherent traditional operations.

**MR:** One concern that many people have expressed to me is over vertical integration. Is that a concern of the Farm Bureau?

**GH:** Well, our delegate body will be coming together in our state convention next year, and they'll be talking about how much of an effect will vertical integration have in farming. Naturally, where we've got corporations operating hog operations from the feeder pigs up to the finished product, that really isn't a farming operation as much as it is a packing operation. We think that there needs to be recognition of each of the industries within their own right. There is going to be a lot of discussion on that.

Farmers want to manage their operations. They don't want somebody making all the management decisions any more than any other industry does. To the degree that vertical integration removes those management decisions, it's a less desirable form of operation.

**MR:** Certainly the hog producers must be especially concerned about that.

**GH:** Hog producers, to a large degree, and, of course, we can see it moving into beef and dairy production, and other areas in varying degrees.

**MR:** To what extent is the Farm Bureau driven by its members in terms of setting policy? Is policy developed from the ground up, or is it more from the top down?

**GH:** We pride ourselves on our grass-roots policy-making efforts. We start out at the member level--bringing members together to express their ideas, taking those ideas to their township and county meetings, the counties to the state organization, and the states to the national level. We are proud of the fact that once our delegates have taken a position policy-wise, it's carved in granite until the delegates come together and make that change. I, as a staff member in an administrative role, have no authority to make any changes or compromises in any policy. Our lobbyists can't compromise policy. Our board can interpret, but they cannot compromise. So we take great pride in the fact that we are a grass-roots organization and that we are immovable as far as the policies that are enacted by our delegates.

**MR:** One perception is that the Farm Bureau is fairly conservative in its policies. To what extent would you agree with that statement?

**GH:** I think that's probably kind of accurate. We are conservative in that we believe in the rights of the individual. We believe that the individual has the right to work within a framework that gives him freedom in decision-making. If that would be the definition of "conservative," then we would qualify very well.

I do think that sometimes we and other farm organizations are bracketed into political parties, and that's often a misconception. There may be times that one political party happens to be moving in the same direction as a given farm organization, but that doesn't necessarily complete the marriage vows between the two.

**MR:** Historically, Minnesota has been a wellspring of almost radical farm organizations, like the Grange, American Ag Movement, Groundswell, and so forth. To what extent has that hurt your membership or perhaps helped it?

**GH:** Let me say, first of all, in defense of the Grange, I've never thought of it as being radical. It has been a very staid organization over the years and probably the oldest in the whole group of farm organizations.

**MR:** Well, when the Grange was founded, its policies initially were perceived as being somewhat radical.

**GH:** Let me just say that many organizations have come and gone, and we're still here. We're still here because we've maintained the voice of reason. As you travel the roads of history, you'll see the skeletons of many farm organizations that came into being to do something specific. Either they succeeded and completed their mission, or they failed and they had no place to go. We have tried to deal with the issues through the years as they have come about. We've tried to deal with them responsibly, and we've tried to avoid getting into an emotional situation that has removed that degree of reason. Over the years, we have lost members and regained them with the rise and fall of some of the more militant movements. But our stability has remained fairly constant over the years, and nationwide, we've continued to grow. Our stability has had an influence on the desire of farmers as to what organization they want to belong to.

**MR:** Minnesota has had, in the past years, an agricultural commissioner who's been viewed as fairly activist. Has the Farm Bureau been able to work with Jim Nichols?

**GH:** Yes, very well. Let me say that Jim Nichols is the most agreeable disagreeable person that I've ever known, and I was quoted on that in the paper not too long ago. Even Jim liked that quotation. Jim Nichols has done an excellent job of running the Department of Agriculture and its normal functions. Administratively, they've done a very good job. Jim has gotten into some political areas that we don't agree with, nor do we think that he should be in them, but we've maintained open lines of communication. We've had a mutual respect for one another and the positions of each, and we have found Jim to be very cooperative to work with.

**MR:** Out of the economic turbulence of the 1980s, Minnesota has developed some farm programs that became models for other states, like the farm mediation and the farm advocate programs. How does the Bureau perceive such programs?

**GH:** We have been very supportive of the farm mediation program, and we think the results of that have been very favorable. Using the expertise of the University has made it a more credible program.

We have not been as totally enthusiastic over the advocate program, because we are not convinced that totally qualified people have been used as advocates in the program. But obviously, to some people they've played a role was very significant and valuable at the time. We are more supportive of the mediation program because we think it had a stronger base of credibility.

**MR:** You come from the state of Illinois, which has had a tradition of a strong extension service, as has Minnesota. How has the Farm Bureau worked with the extension service over the years?

**GH:** Oh, I think it's been one of the closest relationships of any entities in agriculture. We have a fine long-term relationship. We've always been supportive of the land grant college and all of the aspects of that. We intend to continue to be very close in our association with extension and 4-H and all the things they represent. It's been a winning combination, and certainly we want to keep it that way.

**MR:** One thing that we've been interested in in this project is how people view the prospects for agriculture in the 1990s and beyond. As sort of a summary, can you give me an idea of what your views are on that?

**GH:** There has never been a better time for someone to get into agriculture, because a young person who wants to make a small investment of capital in a sensible way can get farmland, can get good used equipment, and get himself in business. If he uses a temperate, conservative approach, he can be successful.

As far as agriculturally related occupations, last year the universities didn't turn out nearly enough people to meet the demand of the agricultural industry. There's a very, very good opportunity for young people going into the ag schools--ag journalism, agricultural engineering, the biotechnological areas that are coming into the picture. I think that the future is absolutely limitless. Never before, in my opinion, has there been a better time to get into agriculture. The future of agriculture, while it is not going to be the same type of agriculture that we've known over the past, is going to be a great place to be.

**MR:** In what way do you think agriculture will be different?

**GH:** Well, as I said earlier, there aren't going to be the booms and the busts. I think the technological changes are going to be tremendous. We've seen amazing changes over the years that I've been in agriculture. You might say that "we ain't seen nothing yet." The scientific community needs to respond to the real challenges of making agriculture viable and acceptable to the consumer public, of feeding the burgeoning numbers of people. We're going to need to learn how to better manage, to better market, to better provide ways to produce acceptable and variable crops. The possibilities are exciting.



**MR:** Once again, education will be important. Farmers will have to be highly responsive to these changes.

**GH:** Education is going to be the key. No one in any industry has to have a broader perspective in all segments of education than a farmer. He's got to be a chemist, he's got to be an engineer, he's got to be a scientist, and he's got to be a tremendous manager. The people who prepare themselves to meet those challenges are going to be the leaders in the future of agriculture.

**MR:** Thank you, Mr. Hagaman.

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