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SBOH-8, Craig Tarke

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Cora Stryker: This is Cora Stryker interviewing Craig Tarke on March 3, 2006. First of all, I just wanted to say thanks for taking time out of your busy farming schedule. I just talked to your father Kermit, and he was telling me that he mostly ranched sheep up here. And you don't do sheep now, do you?

Craig Tarke: No.

Cs: What do you farm here now?

Ct: We've been farming rice, alfalfa and almonds. Some small grains but that's kind of gone to the wayside in the last couple years. I raised sheep with my dad – we were partners from '88 until, I guess it was '95. So that was the last time I was involved with sheep.

Cs: And why the shift?

Ct: From the sheep ranching? It was just the price was always declining, seemed like it was a lot of work for a wage, you know, is what it came down to. It wasn't that profitable.

Cs: And the almonds and the –

Ct: The almonds is something I did, that's sort of what I got into right before I left the sheep. And then the alfalfa I planted when we first started with the sheep, in 1988 I planted alfalfa, so I got into that. Hay, and hay's been really a sort of mainstay for me since then, so.

Cs: And so, what about, I mean, did you grow up in this house?

Ct: Next door.

Cs: Next door. So how did it come to pass that you and your family –

Ct: Ended up here?

Cs: Yeah.

Ct: Oh, this was my grandmother's home. And she passed away in '94, I believe (corrected by Ct to 1995). At that time Dad was really really sick, and she willed this part of the ranch to me. He actually took care of all of it before, but rather than willing it to him we were going to save a lot in inheritance taxes down the line. We were looking at that because that was going to be a real big issue. And since then they've changed that

a little bit, but it still would've been a big issue. So basically I paid a lot of the state taxes on it in exchange for the home and the property and stuff. I never lived here before – I came over here a lot, I spent a lot of time with my grandmother here. But, no it was a new experience for me to live here! [laughs]

(Corrected by Ct to: "So basically I paid the estate taxes on it in exchange for the home and property.")

Cs: Absolutely. A couple ghosts wandering –

Ct: [laughs] Well – not too much that, it's just this wasn't a real comfortable home to live in during the winters and summers, especially upstairs, we didn't have any central heat so in the summers you couldn't bear it up there. I mean, you'd be just sweating –

Cs: And the wind –

Ct: And the winters were just the opposite, they were just freezing cold. And when we first got here [points to the fireplace] that was just a big old hole in the wall, so it was an open pit fire, and you'd come in here and the air that thing'd draw up, I mean this room was never warm. So that made a big difference when we put that in there. Sort of plug that big old whole, and made one room so you could bear it. Yeah, cause this house doesn't have any insulation or anything –

Cs: Still?

Ct: Well, the rooms we've remodeled, we put it in. But this is basically how it's been for a hundred years. There's about four or five layers of wallpaper underneath there.

Cs: [laughs]

Ct: And that's basically what they'd –

Cs: Used as insulation?

Ct: Yeah well that's basically what they'd done to this, just put new wallpaper up.

Cs: And this was put up by your grandmother?

Ct: This paper? I'm not sure. Probably, hard to tell. You know, really, she didn't do much decorating. She came in here and she pretty much just left things alone. So I couldn't tell you the progression of wallpaper, but we're eventually going to try to get this room –

Cs: That would be an interesting, like, archeological – [laughs] to like, peel them all back.

Ct: Yeah, you get into some, this house is a whole nother story, cause you get into that plaster and it's got animal fur in there, they used that to bind it together back then. That's all really heavy in lime, it just kind of crumbles. It's really messy stuff. Really, back then they used everything they had to their, you know, they had available, to make things easier and cheaper.

Cs: Wow, god bless fiberglass.

Ct: [laughter] Yeah. It is, it's a lot easier.

Cs: So, I wanted to ask, what sort of changes in your lifetime have you seen growing up on this property, in terms of the wildlife and the way the land has changed?

Ct: Well, the wildlife has been around a lot. In some ways it's gotten better, I think. Some of the – especially the hawks and the raptors and stuff.

Cs: There are so many, I saw dozens coming in ...

Ct: Yeah, during the, when I was in high school it wasn't that way and then in the 70s and 80s when they were using a lot of parathion chemicals in the orchards, that, the hawks and all that used to go in there and use it as a refuge, you know, go in there and get prey, so you had a lot of those dying off. And now, they've made a big comeback.

Cs: So they don't use the spray anymore?

Ct: No. Most guys are using a lot of softer materials. Parathion sort of had the same connotation as DDT. That was used for a long time, so.

[Inaudible interaction with Maureen]

Ct: I never had problems looking for wildlife. Just really finding the time to go out and do that kind of stuff. But I do duck hunting and don't deer hunt too much, but there's a lot of people who want to be deer hunting. And then for the first time two years ago I seen a bald eagle up the road here, which I've never seen in my lifetime. So that's another good thing. So I think those kind of birds have come back. We'll probably never see elk and all that kind of stuff again, so –

Cs: No grizzlies?

Ct: No, no [laughs]. Most of the changes have been, really the biggest change has been just how the area has gone sort of – agrarian culture down to where people are sort of moving out of town and ... that's changing a lot. It hasn't really brought on any problems with me, but I know a lot of people are kind of worried about what kind of repercussions that has.

Cs: Why do you think it's happening?

Ct: What, the –

Cs: The people moving –

Ct: Into this area?

Cs: Do you mean people moving into the area or out?

Ct: Moving into this area.

Cs: What are people worried about?

Ct: Well, say, if you're an orchardist and you have a subdivision going next to you then all of the sudden you have to spray something, well people think you're spraying poisons no matter what you're spraying. So, they'll call in and then, a guy's almost got to go door-to-door and say, this is what I'm doing. And a lot of people haven't had to deal with that, you know, they just dealt with neighbors. And some people have a whole – they don't want to know why, they just don't want to see it. Most of the time nowadays with all the regulations, there's so much more in place now than there was fifty years ago, that you really don't have much chance for damage to people or animals or anything. You actually have more likelihood of hurting your neighbor's crop, as far as what, you know you got to have that, some sprays for other things, it's so diverse that –

[interruption – Insurance Salesman]

Ct: So, yeah, and just, farming's really changing right now. It's going through some big, big changes and there's not a lot of options out there anymore for people. You know we used to grow a lot of sugar cane – or not sugar cane – but sugar beets around here and tomatoes, and what's happened is we've almost gone to a monoculture of rice. And a few tomatoes, and what that has done is it's made all these less competitive. So now the people who market rice can pretty much control the market. That's what's going on right now, the rice industry's really a bad – you want to do a research paper [laughs] that would be really a good one to get into. Yeah, because a lot of people are giving up stuff right now and a lot of other people are getting the land and then trying to do the insurance game thing on it where they'll insure it thinking that maybe the weather'll be real bad and they won't be able to do it. That has changed a lot too.

Cs: What's bringing on the big changes?

Ct: Do you mean the change in the crops? It's just imports. And they can import stuff a lot cheaper than they can do it here. So that's sorta changed a lot. But the nuts have really helped a lot of people here because that's been a good payer here in the last few years. And California's the only really state that has them. Like on rice we're competing against Louisiana, Texas and the south and all that.

Cs: Yeah, nuts are expensive. [laughter]

Ct: Yeah, they're more expensive now than they have been, that's for sure. But that's all come about in the last five years.

Cs: And they're not importing those?

Ct: The almonds? No, almonds are mainly grown here. And walnuts also.

Cs: Oh wow, that's interesting. So, I'm trying to get a sense of like, you know I grew up in a totally different, much more densely populated area, and I'm trying to get a sense of what it was like growing up here. I mean, how insular was it? How often did you leave the immediate area, was it, I mean – was this sort of –

Ct: My domain? [laughs] Yeah, pretty much. Yeah, we didn't have many neighbors. I had some friends who lived in Sutter and we did a lot of things, went to movies together and stuff like that but mostly when I was younger I, when I was really young I was sort of a horse show brat I guess you could say. My mom carted us all around showing horses when I was like eight and nine, ten. During the seventies. And so I didn't do a lot of these Little League things and all that, and soccer and all that. She had her own sort of little horse group and I don't know why – [laughs] I guess I just did it cause that's what I had to do, I don't know. [laughter] But then I got a little motorcycle and that really opened doors for me. [laughs] Yeah, when I was nine or ten I got that so I could go all over the place [laughter] and run over to my uncle's and, you know, cause I could go a couple miles and never even get on a road, so I had a lot of opportunity to sort of explore [laughs]. And then we spent a lot of time, not a lot of time, but down here in the little river, the little slough here, going fishing or frogging.

Cs: What kind of fish do they have in there?

Ct: Just catfish usually.

Cs: And that's stocked, right?

Ct: No, it's just wild.

Cs: It's wild?

Ct: Yeah. It isn't really – you don't want to eat the fish out of there too much. [laughs] Because it's sort of a, not a real clean body of water.

Cs: Yeah, there's a lot of runoff and –

Ct: Runoff and it's just, it gets kind of stagnated during the summer because people actually take water out and they drain water in it so it's sort of a big filter, I guess.

Cs: And did you guys spend much time up in the buttes? Camping or picnicking or anything like that?

Ct: You know, not that much. For Easter we'd go up there, to my cousin's down the road. But, you know it's sort of hard to get – the kids go hiking up there, but they haven't really scratched the surface yet. They could really go a long ways if they wanted to.

Cs: And all that land your Dad was using for sheep. What's happening to it now?

Ct: It's still, he leases it out for sheep. And another guy rents it for sheep.
(Corrected by Ct to "It's still used for sheep. He leases it out to a sheep rancher.")

Cs: So that's where the other 20% of his – we were talking and he said about 80% of his profit or revenue comes from the natural gas. And I was wondering where the other 20 came from but it sounds like the leasing –

Ct: Yeah, that and he leases some to me and gets income from rice and stuff but yeah, he's been fortunate in that way [laughs].

Cs: Yeah, it doesn't seem like that many people in the buttes have that.

Ct: No, no, but that's gone on for a couple generations anyway.

Cs: And is that something you're going to –

Ct: Yeah, but the gas is always depleting, but what's changing is the price of the energy.

Cs: Right, right.

Ct: Five to ten years ago, it wasn't worth nothing hardly. People didn't get much money. But, twenty years ago during the '80s he got a lot of money and then now –

Cs: That's amazing cause I asked him, have they done surveys and how long do they think the natural gas will last, and he's like, 'Forever! It'll be here forever!' And I'm like, 'Oh, really.'

Ct: [laughs]

Cs: That's what our culture seems to think! [laughs]

Ct: Yeah, as far as the family. We could probably have, if we could get gas down here it'd supply us forever. It's not really that it's going to run out it's just they can't get the volume to make the production efficient. Cause it costs them so much –

Cs: To get it out.

Ct: Right and to deal with it, but, now they're getting so much for it, you know, even a well that was considered unproductive five or ten years ago is now worth something.

Cs: That's amazing. We live in very strange times.

Ct: Yeah, that gas isn't going to last forever, I know that! [laughs]

Cs: [laughs] Yeah, I wasn't about to contradict him, but um ... yeah, yeah. So, what are your, and Maureen you can jump in here too, what are your thoughts about this new state park?

Ct: I don't know, I guess it's okay.

Maureen Tarke (Craig's wife): I think it's better than development.

Ct: If they try to make it like a real state park like Yosemite or one of these other, it's going to cost some money, I mean maybe they oughta do something where they don't have to put all the facilities in. It's a neat place, have you been up there?

Cs: I haven't been to Peace Valley, no. I went on a hike a couple weeks ago on Marty's property and it's gorgeous, but I haven't been to Peace Valley yet.

Ct: I would say Peace Valley would be a place where you could really get the feel of the Indians, where they wanted to live because I'm sure that was a real thriving area at one point.

Cs: Yeah I think they have some like, Indian artifacts.

Ct: Oh yeah, there's grinding stones.

Mt: We should take her down to the bypass on the water and show her the grinding stones there.

Ct: In that area there's literally hundreds of those. And there's areas where there's rock that's been eroded or whatever almost like little cave areas where it's just like a little house in there where you can sort of see them living, and then they've got a thing that they actually dug and made – I don't know [to Maureen] – what's that called? They dig a big pit and line it with rock and then, there might have been a structure over the top of it or something –

Mt: [Inaudible] I thought it was interesting they said on one of those tours, a lot of times you go around and you see those old Victorian homes, you know old old homes, and that's probably a site where the Indians probably once lived. Settlers chose their homes by you know, high ground, similar to what the Indians – and we have found, Craig found like an arrowhead [inaudible]

Cs: Do you know like any folktales or any myths about the Native Americans from this area? I mean, not like through books but sort of through ...

Ct: Not Native Americans, I've never really heard of ...

Mt: Actually we've learned more since our daughter's been in school ... you know, them bringing home information ...

Cs: Anything about the settlers?

Ct: I think around here it used to be more like a little community, though, well it was. That's just sort of weird. Down the road here is West Butte. They used to have post office down there and a school. And there's probably eight or ten different homes there, families and stuff. They tried to make it – and there was other people out here besides my grandfather who came out here and tried to homestead and they ended up not making it and all the structures sort of went away and then my grandfather stayed and bought some of the properties and some other people stayed and brought some of the properties and stuff and it seems like it sort of died out down there, you know, the post office died and all the people who were over there sort of died and then now it's sort of reinhabiting down there with a whole different deal. People are coming from out of town who want to get out of town. They have their big houses and they have – but it isn't like they're moving here to make a living they've already made their living or whatever so it's just trying to get away from wherever they're at. So that's sort of different, you know? It's like a fading, and then a, people coming back.

Cs: So how do you feel about that? About people –

Ct: I don't, you know, if it's for sale and they want to buy it I guess they can buy it. It's sort of unpersonal. Cause you don't know the people. And I guess, in the past, you know the neighbors used to help each other, that's a big thing, probably lost more than anything is the neighborly helping. A long time ago people used to help their neighbor out, try to get the crops in and stuff. Now everybody is focused to just make their living, I mean there's just no extra to do that. That's sort of a big change.

Cs: Do you think it's cause people are just working so hard to make ends meet they don't have time –

Ct: Yeah, and it's competitive.

Cs: Neighbors compete with each other.

Ct: Right. That was actually more of a bigger thing during the seventies, I think. During that time because people were making better money so they were speculating a little more and now it's sort of people are just trying to hang on.

Cs: And what do you see happening to this land that your family owns, you know, a couple generations down the line?

Ct: Oooh. [laughs] If you look at all the projections of development, I don't see how it's going to keep it away unless they –

Cs: Well, people are – people are holding on – I'm sure you guys know more about this than I do but Middle Mountain Foundation ... they're trying really hard to not let that happen. And there are all these Conservation Easements, I don't know if anyone's talked to you about that yet .... [cut]

Mt: We just hope to leave it to our children, and hope they don't sell it.

Ct: Well, and there's more to it than that too. There's a lot of reality to it, cause for some people it's costing a lot to own.

Cs: You mean with taxes and –

Ct: Taxes and that sort of thing ... you know if they really want to preserve them they probably ought to come up with some kind of tax break. If they did that they could keep this. I mean the county might not like it but you know you're not going to make a lot of tax revenue off this, off my place verses what they're making off of Walmart, or something like that. You know they're going to have to figure that out if they want to do that. If they did that I'm sure you'd get a lot less desire and stuff. You know if you have a widow and she dies and then all of a sudden she's got to try to take care of it, it's just overwhelming. So you know, if it's costing money and you're not making much money and ... I keep getting these tax increases in the mail every year saying ... and that's another thing, I guess, with the houses. It's sort of inflated our value of our land in the county's eyes. And then at the same token they're telling us that we can't really do what ... we can't subdivide because they've already let these guys subdivide and they've got bad feedback from it so now they're back-peddling ...

[Cora's rant on private conservation, easements etcetera]

Ct: Well we were glad when the county adopted the Williamson Act, cause that reduced my taxes big time. [laughs]. I mean they were really taxing us.

Mt: [inaudible] ...

Cs: Is this mostly local taxes or federal taxes?

Mt: Local tax.

Ct: Local tax.

Mt: County tax.

Ct: And you look at that and you know, they're overtaxing – they're taxing the agriculture part of it to support services for the masses too. So there's going to be a point where that doesn't work anymore cause it's just not going to pay for all those people. [5 second pause]. And when they make your land more valuable, that isn't good either.

Cs: Is there anything I didn't ask about that you think is important for the record?

Ct: [15 second pause]. They're probably lots of things. [laughter]

Cs: There always are! [Ironically]. Distill your life into three sentences, now! [laughs]

Ct: [laughs] Yeah, hmm.

Mt: I've got a history book here from 1906. It's got a page about the Tarkes. I heard when you were asking Kermit about who bought the land. But it says here that Hoke and Tarke bought the land together.

Cs: That's what I read! And he said no, they were separate.

[inaudible]

Ct: Did you show her – don't we have that other history book? [inaudible] The one with all the pictures, and the houses. The history of Sutter County.

[cut]

Ct: Hang on, I've got an old paper I should show you. An old newspaper. Those are neat to look at.

Cs: Sure.

[tape turned off while Ct gets the paper.]

Ct: ... this place is pretty much undeveloped, so you're talking here about the fertiles, Sutter's trade fertiles, it's just a lot of positive stuff in here about opportunity.

Cs: Look at that, 'Sutter the Land of Opportunity.'

Ct: Yeah. It's sort of funny that agriculture sort of got everybody here, sustained them for maybe 75 years or so and now it's sort of gone to – it's sustaining them but in a different way, you know? [8 second pause] Peaches were a big – peaches in the buttes, that just cracks me up, makes Sutter county famous. Peaches, really – I mean if you talked to somebody today and said, 'Oh, I'm planting peaches in the buttes,' they'd probably think you're crazy. [laughter] But you know they felt that that would be an opportunity. I think you know why they came in the buttes was because it was higher

ground and maybe that's where all the real flood control came along. But this is like – ten tons an acre [pointing to a caption boasting 'Ten Tons An Acre' yield of peaches in the Sutter Buttes] and now they're up to thirty tons.

Cs: Of peaches?

Ct: Yeah. In this day and age.

Cs: Oh, the average production is thirty tons an acre.

Ct: Yeah, so a lot of things have changed in that regard ...

Cs: [reading a headline] 'Peaches and Buttes Make Sutter County Famous.'

Ct: I don't know if you know much about Butte [corrected by Ct to "Yuba"] City. But a lot of those streets like Walton, Stabler and all those, those were named after horticulturalists and the people who settled there. Stapler was one of the first horticulturalists in the county, I don't know if it was like an extension service or something. Got some old footage here and stuff that he'd send out to farmers and stuff with recipes and grasshopper poison recipes ... that was the kind of stuff they used back then ... you know, a tablespoon of strychnine and this and that and make your little concoction. [laughter] I mean it's really different. They had a lot of hazards back then.

Cs: Wow.

Ct: See, here's Stapler right here [pointing to the paper], he was a 'Horticultural Commissioner.' So what they have now is an Ag Commissioner in the county. And he sort of regulates pesticide permits and does that kind of stuff. But these guys back then they weren't really worried about pesticides and permitting and regulation, they were actually more worried about what can we do to get food out here, or something like that. So, that's sort of interesting.

Cs: Yeah, I read that a lot of the original settlers were farming for the gold miners in the Sierra Nevada. Cause it was like more fertile land around here than there was closer to the Sierras.

Ct: My grandfather dabbled in the mining. He was in that a little bit with some partners.

Cs: In the Buttes?

Ct: No, no, Sierras. He had a claim and stuff. Did they tell you that folklore story about how he went up there to look for gold and traded the starving miners ounce for ounce of wheat for gold?

Cs: No!

Ct: Oh, that, that is a folklore story too.

Cs: With your grandfather? An ounce of wheat for an ounce of gold?

Ct: Yeah well he went up, he was sort of behind the forty-nine, he went up there a little later. And I guess the story goes that he took his provisions, a few sacs of wheat or whatever, and when he got up there all of them were starving and wanted food and he traded them for [laughs] ounce for ounce ... I know that's a folklore story! But that was a good one. That's about the only one I know. Some of these, what they take for stuff back then it just blows you away. Things were just so much cheaper, you know. [pages flipping] You read through these ... 'Schools Show Rapid Growth ..."

Cs: This is 1920?

Ct: 1926.

Cs: [reading] '312 acres of prunes in one orchard.'

Ct: Yeah, see, that was the big –

Cs: That's low now, right?

Ct: Yeah, that's like, some outfits down south might plant three or four thousand acres at one time, maybe not of prunes, but maybe almonds or something like that. This is an interesting number, I'd like to know how many farms are left in Sutter County. Cause at that time there were sixteen-hundred and ninety-four. And I bet you that number is significantly lower. Significantly lower. Matter of fact, probably in Sutter County you're talking probably ... well, it's hard to say. It's hard to say. There used to be a lot of 20 acre, 30 acre farms right here in the Yuba City area but now that's all been paved over now. A lot of those ... That's sort of a ... different feel there. [noises] And this is sort of neat. [reading] 'Sutter Basin Booming.' [also reading] 'It's in the heart of progressive Sacramento valley with the bay city markets at your door.' [laughter] [reading] 'Sutter Basin will plant and care for your ten acres for you on easy terms.' See, this is something you really don't see in a paper. I mean here you've got a big farming company that's just speculating on a real good future. [reading] 'Robbins [?] is the new town in the heart of this rapidly developing district.

[change tape]

Cs: ... I went through Grimes on my way up here, it was like a ghost town. I mean, was there some kind of plant in Grimes? Some kind of production plant there?

Ct: There's a oil seeds press.

Cs: Is that what it was? Yeah, cause it was really sleepy when I went through. I wonder, cause you know the State Park is going to have a little interpretive center about the

history of the area and some of these oral histories might actually be used in that and I wonder how much they're going to focus on the history of farming in this area, and how much they're going to focus on, you know, geologic history, or Native American history ...

Ct: Yeah, the ranching has a lot of history, you know, two or three people probably owned all that area up there.

Mt: Do you like provolone cheese?

Cs: No cheese, please. Thank-you. Thank-you for asking.

Ct: It's had its trials and tribulations but I've enjoyed living here. I lived in Fresno when I was going to school at that was really sort of, I was able to make comparisons, but I did enjoy living there and everything, but I was always wanting to get back here. [pause] You just experience so much more. I mean, some people have said, well, 'what do you do?' I mean I've seen – like when I'm out working or something and cutting hay or something, just having a – a golden eagle come down like four feet in front of you and pick up a little cottontail and stuff like that, you just don't – a lot of people don't ever see that kind of stuff.

Cs: [to Maureen, who had brought a sandwich]. Oh, thank-you so much. [to Craig] Did you eat lunch?

Ct: No I had a big breakfast.

Mt: Roast beef? [inaudible] Or Pastrami?

Ct: Well you got turkey too, right?

Mt: Roast beef, corned beef, and I think we have Pastrami.

[laughter]

Mt: ... I buy the turkey and everyone's like, [in a little girl's voice] 'I'm sick of turkey! We want roast beef!'

Ct: I'll take ...

[inaudible]

Mt: I put the cucumbers on the side, cause ...

Cs: I love cucumbers, thank-you ... Mmm.

Mt: [yelling from a distance] Which one did you want, Craig?

Ct: Um. Roast Beef. [reading the paper] This guy –
Cs: Spencer?

Ct: Ya ever heard of him? [laughs]

Cs: I haven't, no.

Ct: Oh, that's in the Sutter Basin. I never knew this, but ... originally ... here's a guy who's farming and he's got 7,000 pure-bread ewes. Pure-bred ewes. Not just regular old ewes, but 7,000 pure-bred ewes.

Cs: [with a full mouth] I didn't know that pure-bred existed.

Ct: Well pure-bred would be like a suffix [?] that's got a progeny that they kept track of. Actually that just reminded me of probably the biggest culture change around here, cause this used to be a, everybody ranched sheep out here. They had wheat, what they called aftermath crops. And my uncle and my dad did that a lot when they were kids. They had these sheep, so in the summertime when everyone got done harvesting their grain you'd run your sheep out there. And do that from field to field, move these sheep for miles around, you know. And now all that – that whole culture left probably, I guess in the sixties or fifties. But before that, I mean, that's how the whole valley was. I mean everybody had a lot of sheep, and now they take crop up and [slaps his hand] they're right there, discing it. Getting it ready something else, you know, it's like, you cannot leave that stuff sit – so that's a real big difference. It was a slower pace. And I think, talking about the neighborly thing, what made that work is it was more, everyone was more neighborly, 'Hey' [quoting], 'You bring your sheep down here,' and stuff like that. So that was a – that's sort of a big culture thing. Because a lot of these farms were totally self-sufficient. You know, they had one or two milk cows, some chickens and this and that, you know. You didn't really have time to take a wagon and horses fifty miles round-trip all two days, whatever it takes, so ... That's a <u>big</u> change, actually, you know, now I'm starting to think of stuff. You know, all the employees my grandfather had. I mean, here I am sort of solo, but he probably had ten, fifteen men around here all the time.

Cs: Who were they?

Ct: Just, guys that he could find in town. You know, you get all kind of characters. Also a lot of times you get the bottom of the barrel. [laughter] You know? Guys willing to come out, and want to work and stuff, they're usually ... you didn't have to bring a big resume, let me put it that way.

Cs: Two arms, two legs. [laughter]

Ct: Yeah. That's probably a change, cause you know, the labor was way more plentiful then than it is now. Cause people aren't really, you know, if you want to work for a

minimum wage job you can work in town at a McDonalds in a better environment than ... farmers are sort of in the squeeze now to keep competitive for labor, so they're really having to pay more than what maybe they can afford, long term anyway, but everyone's got to make a living, so ... There's a lot of changing in that. Less labor. That's been going on forever, now. From the time when there was a lot of labor, tried to get [inaudible] it's just gone to less labor. Peaches were harvested by hand all the time and then they invented the mechanical shakers, and now they've actually gone back to hand-picking them, [the screech of some kind of bird or prey – a hawk or peregrine – in the background] cause [people?] don't want the machine harvest cause they cause a little bruising, and they're not as easy on the peaches.

Cs: Do they still grow peaches up here?

Ct: In the buttes? Not really. Almonds took off, but peaches were over by Yuba City and Live Oak. That's really actually better ground for peaches. And that's sort of a weird thing cause peaches five years ago were a hot commodity to be growing. And now with imports, that's sort of gone. I mean we've got all these crops that really managed at first, to be competitive and profitable, and being able to make a living. Now the diversity's sort of shifting, and we're not as diverse, and we can't compete and ... it's changing really quick. It's changing really quick.

Cs: Yeah, I read a statistic once that said that on average our food travels a thousand miles to us. On the average.

Ct: Hmm. Yeah, I believe that.

Cs: Where do they grow peaches?

Ct: Oh, everywhere in the Yuba City area ...

Cs: I mean the imports.

Ct: I believe the peaches are coming from Spain. Spain or ... somewhere where they've got a similar growing climate. I believe it is Spain, cause actually Spain's the only competition for California almonds. And Spain has a whole different culture. They grow they're almonds on, [gesturing out the window to the buttes], they like put them out here on these hills. They grow them, they plant real far apart, they don't irrigate them, it's all natural rain-fed agriculture. So they haven't become a threat to California almonds because they just don't have the production. They can't get the production. And now you've got people rather than growing rice and all these open land field crops, they're trying to get into orchards, so that's going to be a interesting thing. We'll probably overproduce what we've got going good now, and then that'll go down, and you know, so. So you basically, when you're a farmer, you don't bank on making it [laughter]. If it seems like it's a little too good, it's probably not going to last. [laughs]

Cs: [laughs] [pause] [to Maureen] This sandwich is delicious. Thank-you. I really like it.

Mt: [to Craig] It's not roast beef, sorry, there wasn't hardly any roast beef left.

Ct: That's alright.

[inaudible]

Cs: It's amazing, almost everything in this paper is about farming, land or development. I mean ... [reading headlines] 'Live Oak Grows as Big Tracts Are Subdivided," you know, 'Beams among young trees .." I mean, I bet if you picked up a local newspaper now you'd have totally different stories.

Ct: [eating] Well this paper was serving the population that was here. So, that's the change that's really made there. This place here [pointing to the paper] is still there ...

Cs: So what's the demographic like now in Sutter County?

Ct: You mean as far as percent doing this or that?

Cs: Yeah, I mean, some farmers are leaving, but who's coming in? How's it shifting?

Ct: [eating] Well, you have more urban people. I think a lot of the East Indians that bought land in the 50s and 60s are in Yuba City. They were real smart, they had a good work ethic, they brought their families, and the whole family would work. I think that's one big change that family farming's gone through is that's no longer the case, you know. Kids are looking for other ways, I mean, you have to really <u>want</u> to be out here. And you got to really understand that you probably won't ever get rich, and, you know, and there's a risk in it, cause you risk a lot of what you make every year to try to reinvest to try to keep going, you know. A lot of these big farmers, they're actually discouraging kids to get into it.

Cs: Really?

Ct: So that's sort of the – you know, some of those guys have been into it longer than me. So those are the kind of people that have really seen a change.

Cs: Just cause it's too hard a life? They don't want their kids to do it?

Ct: No, I think they like the challenge of it, but it'd be like you taking on a job and then just sort of like working for nothing. You know what I mean? Because a lot of what ends up happening at the end of the year is you end up looking at everything and you didn't make as much as you thought. It's changing big time that way.

Cs: Did you ever think about doing anything else?

Ct: Um, [chuckles]. I really wanted to try to do this. Looking back on it now [laughs] I could've went a lot easier route.
Cs: [laughs] Yeah, well but who would you be?

Ct: Yeah, yeah, definitely you have to look at the whole picture, I guess. You go through a lot of changes. Things don't – I thought things were going to sort of be – I had a real optimistic view of agriculture when I went to school. Because when I was only – let's see how old was I – when I was about fourteen years old I had my very first wheat crop and I made a substantial amount of money. I think I made five or six thousand dollars on my fifty acres and I was thinking, 'Wow, I'm gonna be able to make all kinds of money!' That changed so fast. [laughs] That went to – making that and let's see, by the time I was about twenty, ten years later, you would probably made half that, and another ten years later you might make a quarter of that ...

Cs: That quick?

Ct: Yeah, it went bad, really bad, really cause the price of everything else went up. But yet what you were growing was staying the same or going down. So it was like eating at that every year. Now you got the point where now people don't even want to grow wheat around here, and that's one of the crops that started here, you know? So that's sort of weird. Most of the wheat you see nowadays it's just rotating, they put it in there cause they've had either tomatoes or something else and they can't go year to year with that, so, that's been a big change. It would've been real easy to make it with [an estate?] like that. [laughs] So that's where I decided to switch. I could see the writing on the wall and I said ...

[30 second silence]

Cs: It seems like it can't last. I mean, if we move all our food production further and further away, it just seems like it's setting us up for a disaster.

Ct: [laughs] It'll catch up ... I don't know how long it's going to take ...

Cs: Well that's the question, right?

Ct: It'll probably –

Cs: And how much of our farmlands will be destroyed in the meantime? By development or whatever else?

Ct: Well you know we're a pretty generous country and we, twenty years ago, you know we were going out and showing these developing countries what to do and that might have been a good or bad thing. We sort of cut our own throats, I think. Since we got them established, we're not exporting to them anymore. Actually, they may be having a surplus and they might be creating a worse market, you see what I'm saying? So, as far

as running out of space for food production, it'll be a slow thing, but they don't need to be taking out the rainforest and stuff like that. That's something, that's not good.

Cs: Well, and also just, it's entirely dependent on a world where fuel is cheap. I mean if fuel keep going up the way it's going up, we're not going to be able to import all this stuff as cheap as we're importing it. It's going to cost too much to get it here.

Ct: That's probably going to be one of the – I think that's really the direction should be going, into biofuels and producing grass or matter for generating electricity. I really think that might be – or that or solar, you know?

Cs: Or wind.

Ct: Yeah, we need some other crops in here that will be beneficial not only for the environment but for the energy needs that we're going to ...

Cs: What do you grow to produce ethanol?

Ct: Corn. That won't take off here, it'll take off in the midwest, but, what can we make? Well we can make biodiesel out of soybeans and stuff but ...Texas I guess they're doing some things with grasses, just to burn for fuel or something like that. I don't know, in the meantime you get burning you get [inaudible] stuff like that too, so I don't know how that'll all work out. [pause] You know what's funny is now we've got a whole culture of microfarms, I don't know what to call them, you know where people have four or five acres and they just want to ... and that's sort of created niche markets, like for my hay. People just ... my hay's the only thing that I don't have a middle man really involved in and it's been one of the best things for me just because of that reason. You know I could gauge what I'm going to get, I know what I'm going to get paid for it, and a lot of this agrobusiness now is, you know, they may be in business today they may not be in business tomorrow, so, you know, you're taking a risk on the weather then you're taking a risk on whether you're going to get paid or not. There's a lot of guys that have been taken advantage of or ... yeah.

Cs: Well I think the tides are going to have to turn, I mean ...

Ct: Yeah well you're going to start seeing some changes, cause the way the fuel's going ... and then, see, fertilizer is made with ...

Cs: Petroleum.

Ct: And natural gas a lot of it ... and it's increased the cost tremendously for that stuff. And every time you turned around all this stuff is just going up. There's a lot of expensive inputs, it takes to keep things sort of going. [7 second pause] You know, one thing, like I talked to my PCA – pest control adviser – and he says, 'Yep, one thing's for sure, we won't be doing the same thing ten years from now as we're doing now.' And really, that's how it's happened. People try to make predictions but if you would've told

tomato growers ten, fifteen years ago that they probably won't be growing tomatoes they would've told you you're crazy ... [inaudible] That's all controlled by the cannery. Cannery comes out and plants your seed and then they come and harvest it now too, so ... Guys don't even have to ...

Cs: They just lease the land?

Ct: No, the cannery doesn't lease the land, but the cannery doesn't want a bunch of guys, they don't want a bunch of tomatoes all at once, see, so they're maximizing their ... operating costs for the year ...

Cs: That's really interesting ...

Ct: One thing interesting on the rice, you know, all these big companies, you've got Permi, Farmer's Rice, Connell ... these big rice companies, they're really manipulating the rice growers because they get you to sign up in a pool, what they call a pool, where you pool all the rice together and try to negotiate a better price. Well the thing is you sign up for that but they don't guarantee you any price. And like last year, they can basically say we're only going to give you two dollars over the government loan price when for a guy to break even it might be three or four. Those guys are actually trying to manipulate the market, Connell bought a bunch of rice for a little bit more money and flooded the market with it to try to drive the prices down for the next year. There's a guy in Colusa who started his own little internet trading board. For cash, see, and that's what they don't want. They don't want a cash market cause if a cash market starts there's a price figure there. So they're [laughs] they been doing business the same way for 25 years and now guys are just saying they've had enough, you know. They're selling the rice to them at the same price they did 20 years ago but yet they're cost has double, tripled. And I mean the margin for profitability is just so fine that one little glitch throw it all off. So that's a big – I hope someone does something with that, looks into that, because that's really a bad deal going on right now, and if the federal government is sort of part of the problem, but I don't know what's going to happen with that. That'll be really interesting. Cause they're going to cut out subsides and stuff and ... rice growing is just not going to make it on the global market. The global market for rice is five or six dollars for a hundred pounds. Now that's cheap rice. So, if you try to think of that ...

Cs: It seems almost impossible.

Ct: Well there's countries like China and people only make two dollars, three dollars a day and they're farmers. They might have ... they got little ten acre deals and those, like Japanese farmers, they're very powerful with the government. They're totally subsidized. But yet the world market is [slaps his hands] it's so low you wonder how in the world they can afford ... I don't know.