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Dick Peixoto: Lakeside Organic Gardens

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Dick Peixoto



Photo by Ceasar Garcia

Lakeside Organic Gardens

Dick Peixoto (pronounced Peh-SHOTE) exemplifies a recent type of organic farmer who, after a long career in conventional farming, transitions to organics for a mixture of reasons. Peixoto was born in 1956 in Watsonville, California, the grandson of immigrants from the Azores Islands who have been farming in the Pajaro Valley for the past 100 years. He grew up on the family ranch on Green Valley Road. His father worked off-farm for a fertilizer and pest control company in Watsonville, in addition to working on the family ranch. Peixoto spent his childhood riding around with his dad, dragging spray hoses around apple orchards in the Pajaro Valley. He dates his farming career to eighth grade, when he hired neighborhood kids to pick tomatoes on his family farm so he could market them. In 1976, when Peixoto was a senior in high school, he and his brother, Jim, began growing string beans commercially. Soon after, Peixoto began farming on his own, learning lettuce growing, as well as

irrigation and laser leveling.

Attracted by the organic price premium, Peixoto decided to transition to organic farming, and began Lakeside Gardens on a 55-acre farm in Watsonville in 1996. His conventional farming friends thought he had “lost his marbles,” but Lakeside Gardens has been very successful and Dick has become a spokesperson for integrated pest management, hedgerows and other organic farming methods. The company has expanded their operation to a total of 1200 acres, including fifty different parcels in the Pajaro Valley, many of which border on hospitals and schools trying to reduce pesticide exposure. Lakeside also farms on 500 acres in El Centro, making them one of the larger organic growers on the Central Coast and in California. They grow seventy-five different crops. All of their produce is California grown, and shipped by Albert’s Organics and other organic food distribution companies across the country to grocery stores such as Safeway and Kroger’s, as well as Whole Foods.

Peixoto is outspoken on food safety, water supply, open space preservation, and other issues affecting agriculture, and is often quoted in the media on these topics. Ellen Farmer conducted this oral history on April 18, 2007, at Lakeside Organic Gardens in Watsonville.

Additional Resources:

Lakeside Organic Gardens: <http://www.lakesideorganic.com/>

Carolyn Lochhead, “[Crops, ponds destroyed in quest for food safety](#),” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 13, 2009.

Traci Hukill, “Pajaro Valley Gold,” *Metro Santa Cruz*, February 5-11, 1998.

Donna Jones, “Organic Grower Named County’s Farmer of the Year: Dick Peixoto Follows Traditions and Trends,” June 27, 2009, *Santa Cruz Sentinel*.

Jane Liaw, “USDA Mulls Leafy Greens Regulations,” November 29, 2007, *Santa Cruz Sentinel*.

Beginnings

Farmer: I’m here today on Tuesday, April 18th 2007, with Dick Peixoto at Lakeside Organic Gardens in Watsonville. I think that you probably have one of

the biggest operations going right now in this region for organic farming, wouldn't you say?

Peixoto: I believe that's true, specifically vegetables. There are some sizeable strawberry operations, but we do strictly organic vegetables.

Farmer: Is the acreage all in the Watsonville-Santa Cruz County area, or other places?

Peixoto: We do about eight hundred acres of certified organic ground between Aptos and Moss Landing. We also have an operation down in southern California in the Imperial Valley, where we do four hundred acres, but that's for winter production down there.

Farmer: So do you basically have year-round that way?

Peixoto: Yes, the only reason we have the desert area is just to get through the wintertime, so we keep a year-round product going.

Farmer: Okay. So let's go back in time a little bit. Can you tell me where you born and where you grew up?

Peixoto: I was born right here in Watsonville, California, and grew up right here in Watsonville, California, and never left.

Farmer: And when were you born?

Peixoto: Nineteen fifty-six.

Farmer: How long has your family been here?

Peixoto: My grandfather on my father's side moved here from the Azores Islands, and he was a farmer, farmed potatoes here in the valley back in—that would be probably in the thirties. My father did not do farming. He got into selling fertilizers, pesticides. And then I started the farming again on my own.

On my mother's side, her parents lived in Hanford, California. I'm not sure where they came from before that, but they lived in Hanford, California, and moved here back in the forties.

Farmer: So your parents met here, in Watsonville?

Peixoto: Yes, right here in Watsonville.

Farmer: And what was it like growing up here?

Peixoto: It was a good deal. We lived on a ranch all our lives. We had a fifteen-acre ranch out on Green Valley Road. We moved there when I was ten months old, moved out of town. There were seven of us kids, and we grew up on the ranch. We had apples and cows and chickens, not so much for fun, but more to save money. We had our own beef. We slaughtered our own beef and milked our own cows. When other kids, city folks, would get up to go to school at seven or eight o'clock, we had to get up at six o'clock, go milk the cows first, then go to school. It was a little different. At the time, we thought we were being cheated, but looking back, I think it was a great experience for us to grow up having chores—everything from milking cows to shoveling out the corrals. It was good

work experience. I used to pick apples for my dad. He used to pay us five cents a box to pick apples. It was quite an experience, too. We learned a lot about work ethics, all us kids. Not one of us has ever been out of a job, because we learned the value of a job and worked all our life, most of us here, on agriculture.

Farmer: Did most of you stay in the area, too?

Peixoto: Yes. I have one sister that moved to Salinas, and all the rest of us live here in Watsonville.

Farmer: So how was Watsonville different in the fifties and sixties than it is now?

The Impact of Suburban Sprawl on Farming in the Pajaro Valley

Peixoto: It was a lot smaller back then, that's for sure. I remember still seeing the signs that there were between ten thousand and thirteen thousand people in Watsonville. I think now it's over fifty thousand. I think at that time it was a lot more ag-based. It's a great place to live, weather-wise and everything, all year 'round. So we've got a lot of people that have moved into the area. One of my frustrations with farming in town today is a lot of the people that we have on the streets and in towns and around—they just don't understand how farming works. So when they build million-dollar homes out in the country because they love the country, and then we need to run tractors—back in the old days, all the farming community knew why you had to spray your apples at night, you know? Nowadays a lot of these people don't understand. All they want is the beauty of the area without paying the price for putting up with a lot of the dust and drift and sprinklers and different things that are byproducts of farming.

Slow tractors on the road. People get really frustrated with a lot of the things that we do. Back in the old days, it just seemed like everybody understood it. It was inherent that if you lived here, you knew how the whole system worked. Nowadays I think a lot of people are really removed from that. They've moved in from Silicon Valley. They want to live here. It's a nice place to live. But they don't want to deal with farmers.

Farmer: A lot of people don't even know where their food comes from.

Peixoto: To them, I think, it comes from Safeway and Albertson's. They don't really follow it through to: where does it come from. Things have changed, too. It's not just here. The whole world's changed. It's a global economy now, and who would think that we'd be getting frozen strawberry imports in Watsonville, imported from China? But that's happening today. It doesn't really make sense when you think about the amount of strawberries we grow here, but if you go into the frozen-food department in the local grocery store, a lot of times you'll find out that there's product from China on the shelf, and it makes you wonder: Well, why is that?

Farmer: Does your product end up around the world?

Peixoto: I'd say all of ours stays in the continental United States. We go a little bit into Mexico and quite a bit into Canada, but that's about as far as we go.

Farmer: And is that because it's harder to grow vegetables up there in the winter?

Peixoto: I think probably Canada is one of the fastest-growing organic markets in the world today. Just the whole lifestyle up there. A lot of people are really pushing organic. It's a whole lifestyle change for them, so it's a very high-demand market there. There's just not enough production. They have a limited season. They do a lot more in greenhouses up there because of the weather, and we do a lot more outside over here. So it's a little bit different farming.

The Peixoto Family Farm

Farmer: So what would you consider the early influences were in your life?

Peixoto: Well, probably the biggest influence in the direction I took in my life was driving with my dad when I was seven, eight, nine years old as he worked for a fertilizer/pesticide company here in town. We rode around selling fertilizer and insecticides. He was very hands-on as far as delivering and going out to the fields. They had tractors to apply these things. He would go out and spend time with the drivers out in the fields. So we grew up driving around with him and spending time in the fields, walking around, checking things out, learning a lot about how farming works.

Me and my brothers, and one of my sisters, we're all about the same age. We would all ride with him, but we could take tests of who farmed what piece of ground, and what crops were growing. We prided ourselves on knowing who farmed everything around. That was a big influence for us. There again, my dad taught us a lot of good work ethics back then. I remember him jumping out of the truck when I was a kid at ten years old at a stop sign on Main Street, to start the air compressor on the back because we had to air up the tanks for the fertilizer

tanks, but he didn't want to waste time to wait for the compressor to build up, and he didn't want to waste gas from the house to go charge them. He had it all timed as to how many—When he hit the red light, he jumped out, started it—

Farmer: [Laughs.]

Peixoto: —and hopped back into the truck before the light turned green. We kind of laughed at the time, but it was the kind of thing that we all learned, and put that in our life, too. So that was a big influence for us. And we learned a lot about chemicals and sprays—the good and the bad, and everything in between. But that was probably one of the biggest things in my life, growing up.

And then growing up out on the farm—we grew some raspberries, and we grew apples. As kids, one of our jobs was pulling spray hoses. Back in those days, we didn't have the tractor to spray, so a guy would come in with a big truck with a 500-gallon tank on it, and he would drag hoses through there. He would charge my dad extra if he had to drag the hoses, so us kids would go out and drag the hoses for him while he sprayed. At the time, we weren't thinking about being poisoned or anything. We were just thinking it was a job. So we spent our times—you know, twelve, thirteen years old and dragging hoses for Jim Dalton so he could go spray the apple trees, and that was part of our job. So there again, we learned a lot about how they spray, and how to prune, and how to thin—a lot of the jobs that revolve around the farm.

Farmer: Were there any safety concerns about the chemicals back then?

Peixoto: Didn't seem to be back then. I remember when I was probably thirteen, fourteen, I used to pick blackberries for one of the local farmers here. I remember at lunchtime we had to break early because the plane was going to come in and spray the field. Then after lunch we could go right back to work. So it wasn't even thought to not go back out there after it was sprayed. Even as we'd go back out and find dead rabbits and birds out in the field and things, it was kind of—at that time, the pesticides were ten times as bad as they are today, but we thought nothing of it, and nobody really had concerns about it. It was a different time.

Farmer: Do you remember feeling it at all or anything, knowing it was there, like smelling it?

Peixoto: Smelling it, yes. But I don't remember being sick or anything from it, no, no. I remember seeing those dead rabbits and dead birds, and I thought that was kind of interesting.

Farmer: I'm wondering if you were looking at all the different fields and how everybody was growing things: could you tell when some people had better farming practices than others?

Peixoto: Oh, absolutely, yes. Yes, we used to kind of laugh at different things that people would do. Back then, there wasn't any sprinklers, so a lot of it was furrow irrigation. Sprinklers are an easy way of farming. They're easier. They use less water. Furrow water takes a lot more work to do a proper irrigation. So back in those days, with all furrow water, it was easy to kill your crop if you didn't know how to irrigate properly. I remember driving around, watching people's

fields flooded with water and crops dying because they were doing a bad job. Then we'd go by some people's farms and they did a perfect irrigation. That was one of the big [ways] we could tell [the] difference. Even the seeds—back then, we'd germinate the seeds. Back then, they would plant the seed a quarter to a half inch deep, which wasn't very deep, but then they would furrow the water until the whole field was black, and that would get the seed out of the ground. It was different. Nowadays we sprinkle every day, every other day to try to get it out of the ground. Back then one irrigation would do the job. So you learned to look and see what people's practices were, and tried to learn what to do and what not to do

Farmer: Yes, and you probably had more time to do that in the kind of thing you were doing than people who were sitting on their one piece of land.

Peixoto: Yes, yes. We got around a lot and saw the different farmers. Like I say, we learned who was good and who was bad.

Farmer: Did you learn anything about crop rotation from that?

Peixoto: A little bit. More the use of cover crops, probably more than anything, I would say. Watching people put in cover crops was a bigger issue there. A lot of people never put a cover crop, and the people that did put cover crops—back in those days, I don't think they had it all figured out either, but they were doing their best to build the ground up. It seemed like the guys that did cover crops were doing a pretty good job.

E. coli and Food Safety Issues

Another big practice that's a no-no today is putting raw manure. Most people back then would put raw manure on the ground. It was an ongoing thing. Nowadays we don't put any kind of raw manure. We put compost. Back then, it was an accepted practice to every year go out and put five or ten tons of steer manure or chicken manure on the land.

Farmer: Just whenever?

Peixoto: And that was it.

Farmer: I mean, close to planting?

Peixoto: Yes, it didn't matter. It wasn't really thought of. Nobody even knew what the word *E. coli* meant or *Salmonella*. The words didn't even exist back then. Those are things that kind of evolved in the last twenty years.

Farmer: Got any theories why?

Peixoto: Sure, I do. I think that people—like in the *E. coli* scare of last year Dr. Dean Edell came on national news.¹ He said that back when you were a kid, people said they got 24-hour flu, and he said, "I've got some news for you. There is no 24-hour flu. If you think you had 24-hour flu, you had food poisoning," whether it was *E. coli*, *Salmonella* or whatever. A lot of people's immune systems can fight that off, and then twenty-four hours later your system has adjusted and taken care of it. I just think nowadays we're living in kind of a sanitary world, and I think people's immune systems are not up to speed. If you look at people

that die from these poisonings, from these *E. coli* deals, if you look at them, a lot of them are older people or younger people. Their immune systems probably aren't working properly. I think that has a lot to do with why they're affected more than other people. Some people get sick, and some people die. Back then, I think that people's immune systems had to be up to speed just because of all these things that were going on about the poisons and the manure, raw manure and things. People's immune systems had to be up to fight the battle.

A lot of field workers today that come from Mexico, I think their immune systems are so much better than ours here in the United States, because they've dealt with it their whole life down in Mexico. They're still spraying with pesticides down there that we outlawed thirty, forty years ago. They don't seem to get sick. It takes a lot to get them sick from anything out in the field, whether it's dust or dirt, or any kind of manures, or anything like that. It takes a lot to get them sick. I think their immune systems are working pretty good. That's my theory.

Sustainable Agriculture

Farmer: Interesting. So what does sustainable agriculture mean to you?

Peixoto: Sustainable agriculture would mean managing your entire operation so you'd have the least effect on the environment. And hopefully, like in the Boy Scout motto, you leave the campsite better than you left it. Our goal in sustainable agriculture, the way I look at it, would be you leave the ground in better shape than you started. That's what I feel sustainable agriculture is about.

Farmer: So it's about building the soil and improving it?

Peixoto: Yes, making it better for future generations. In the years past, with the way the farming methods were, you put on what you needed, and harvested what you could get off the land, and then if the land wouldn't produce anymore you'd just move to another piece of land. Nowadays there's a limited resource of land, so we need to take better care of the land we have. The sustainability of that land is dependent on our methods and how we manage it. There're more things that go into it, too. There're a lot of steps that we'd like to—financially, but I don't know when we can do it, but someday using more solar power. It has a less effect on the earth. Using biofuel, as opposed to regular diesel fuel. There're a lot of different things like that that would tie right into the sustainability, not only at the particular piece of land, but the overall picture.

The Next Generation of Farmers

Farmer: And so you're really dedicated to farming, it sounds like, for the rest of your—

Peixoto: I think so. Yes, I am. I'm not sure about the next generation, but I'm pretty committed.

Farmer: So you have kids, yourself?

Peixoto: Yes, I have three kids. I'll be honest with you. I really don't want to get them into farming. I love farming. I've always loved farming. It's a way of life for me. But you really have to have that mentality to put up with all the problems

today. We're under constant siege from the regulations. It's an ongoing thing. There's a shortage of water; they're regulating water runoff. Then the air pollution board is after you for dust from the land that you farm. The planning commission is after you because your fence is too tall. And the Fish and Wildlife is after you because you disked the corridor along the edge, made a road through your ranch that happened to hit some tules. All of these regulations, the compound effect—it's a nightmare to try to outrun all those bullets. There's easier ways to make a living, I can tell you. This is not the easiest way. When my kids ask me, "Do you think I should get into farming, Dad?" I say, "Nah, I think there's better ways. I think we can get you into something different." It's kind of sad that I can't encourage them to continue on with the business. But I'm not alone. I think there's a lot of kids nowadays that are coming up and looking at the way their parents worked. My typical day starts at—I get up at four thirty in the morning, and usually don't go to bed until eleven or twelve o'clock at night. There's a lot of time spent—between paperwork and meetings and going out and watching the fields—everything that we do. It takes that many hours in the day to get it done. It's pretty much a full-time job.

Farmer: And what do you call yourself?

Peixoto: Well, I'm the owner, but I'm like the president or the manager. I do all my own planning of what we plant. I do the planting schedules that say where we plant, what the rotations are. We have to watch rotations in some crops. We can't plant onions back-to-back or leeks back-to-back because they get diseases. So we have to work out the planting schedule and the acreage of each crop. I

have to watch how they grow, and keep in touch with my guys as far as fertilizer programs, and spreading programs, and anything else that we do. And then watching that through to the harvesting and the cooling of the product in our cooler, and the packaging, and then sales and collections, and pretty much the whole thing. So it's a broad-based job. In years past, I was just a "farmer," but because the margins for farmer have been shrinking so much, I was almost forced into looking at some other way to get a better bottom line, and that was to eliminate a lot of the middle-men along the way. They would harvest our product and charge us. They would cool our product and charge us. They would sell our product and charge us. They would sell us cartons and charge us. All the way along, there was a piece being taken out of the pie. Sometimes when you got it back there was only an empty pie plate. There wasn't anything left. Everybody got their cut along the way. So that's one thing that was really frustrating to me, and one of the reasons why I got into organic, because even though eight hundred seems like a lot of acres, in the conventional world that would be a minuscule farmer, and in the organic world it's a pretty sizeable farm. So by getting into organics we were able to become a sizeable player, where conventionally we would just not be.

Farmer: Did you start in '96? I think I saw that on your website.

Lakeside Organic Gardens

Peixoto: Yes, we started Lakeside Organic Gardens in '96.

Farmer: So what were some of your motivations for moving to organic?

Peixoto: My big motivation was survival, really, more than anything. I could see, in a matter of time down the road, five, ten years . . . There're different kinds of sustainable. I could see that the operation would not sustain itself because of all of the pieces of the pie being cut off of the business. At that time, we were one of the sizeable head lettuce growers, probably in the top three in this valley. We did about 2,500 acres of head lettuce conventionally, and had been doing that for years. But still, our margins weren't that good. In each year the pack charge would go up, the carton cost would go up, the sales commission would go up. All of these are things that were kind of after the fact. We grew the crop, and then all these pieces of the pie would be taken off the plate. If there was anything left, we would get it. But sometimes there wasn't anything left.

So back in the early nineties, I started watching these smaller organic growers. Frankly, I thought their farming was terrible. (laughs) A lot of them were very small growers, didn't have the proper tools and everything. I said, if we took the tools that we have today and the operation we have today and applied it to organics, I think we could really make things work. It wasn't quite that easy, but it was a big help, with the equipment and everything that we had, that we transitioned to organic, and then learned to farm. That learning curve was real steep.

Farmer: What were the hardest things?

Peixoto: I thought the big thing was going to be handling the insects, handling bugs. But it really wasn't. That was something we learned fairly quickly. The big problem for us was conventional weed control and soil fertility. Those were the

two big things that we had to overcome. Our tools are limited. In the old days, with weed control you could go out and either fumigate with methyl bromide and annihilate every molecule of everything that's out there and start with clean ground. Or they had these herbicides that you spray. They're pretty darn good and eliminate ninety, ninety-five percent of the weeds, so you really didn't have a big weed problem. Whereas organically, you have nothing. All you have is mechanical tools to control that, and how you handle that. We've developed things over the years. Like we have a propane burner that burns off the weeds, and different tools like that that we're able to use.

Farmer: Is that on a tractor?

Peixoto: Right, we have that, and we have hand burners. Actually, like, in the wintertime, if it's too wet for the tractor, it's a lot cheaper to walk through with burners and burn weeds than it is to later come back by hand and pull each weed by hand.

Farmer: Well, isn't that easier on your body, too? I mean, the hand labor.

Peixoto: Yes. That's one of the things, too. Conventionally you can swing a long-handled hoe all day long because there're no weeds to deal with. But organically you have to get on your hands and knees and pull every weed by hand. There's no other option.

Farmer: And isn't that more expensive, too?

Peixoto: Oh, yes.

Farmer: Just in terms of you have to hire more people, right?

Peixoto: Yes. a lot of times our cost on thinning lettuce—conventionally it would be eighty, ninety to a hundred dollars per acre. Sometimes organically we'll be up to five to six hundred dollars per acre because of the weeds. So it's a big difference. It's not a little thing. It's a huge thing.

Farmer: But then do you get a better price, continuously?

Peixoto: Hopefully. [Laughs.] So far it's worked out. It took us a while, but a lot of the crops we grow are very tough to grow. Like, celery is one of the ones that I thought we'd never be able to grow organically because normally we'd spray between ten to fifteen times to grow a crop of celery. We'd spray for an insect called leaf miner. I got really frustrated at the amount of dollars that we spent to spray our crop to bring it to harvest. Now that we've gotten into organic, with the beneficial [insect] program, the beneficials come in and fight the battle for us. We've never sprayed a block of celery for leaf miner, and we've never had a leaf miner problem. The other thing, too, is celery has a high requirement of nitrogen to grow the crop, and we would normally just pour all the fertilizer we could to it. But we learned how to grow celery now with probably half the fertilizer that we were doing conventionally, and as of this last year, we've actually surpassed what we did conventionally, production-wise. We're producing more units per acre organically than we were conventionally.

Farmer: Oh, that's a good success story, then.

Peixoto: I never thought we'd do that.

Farmer: What does it look like? Is it in mounds?

Peixoto: Celery grows in heads. It grows on a bed, like a mound or like a bed, and then we plant two rows on a bed, and then we transplant those. Usually they're seventy-day-old plants. We plant those, and then from that point it takes between ninety and one hundred twenty days to grow the crop to be ready to harvest.

Farmer: And do you keep that going year 'round with both of your different—

Peixoto: Almost. We have about a two-month gap. We're in the gap right now, so we gap from usually April, May, and then we'll be back in probably the end of May, first of June. But there's a time slot we really can't quite do [celery].

Farmer: I know as a consumer, it's hard to get organic celery to have the texture. It can taste okay, but it can have that kind of airiness.

Peixoto: Yes. They call it pith. I think we've done an excellent job now of preventing that. A lot of the smaller growers haven't figured out how to do it, and it's a real battle. It's taken us a while to learn how to do that, but now I'd say the quality of our celery is as good as conventional. In fact, there's sometimes—you know, weird things happen, where people have a lot of organic celery, and we have crossed over to conventional when we need to, to sell ours conventionally, and never had a complaint on—going to meet conventional standards when we need to. So that says a lot about it. People say our celery tastes a lot better than the conventional. The conventional has kind of a watery taste, and this has a real sweet taste to it.

Farmer: Well, sometimes you can taste the chemicals, I think, on conventional.

Peixoto: [Laughs.]

Farmer: I don't know why. Maybe because it is so watery.

Peixoto: Yes, could be.

Farmer: Well, I think that quality standard is great. And is there any place where you get to show that off, like a county fair for organic?

Peixoto: I guess we could. It's available if we wanted to. We haven't really pursued that, but yes, we could do that.

Farmer: You just want your customers to be happy.

Peixoto: Mm-hm, yes.

Farmer: And who are your customers? Is it brokers, or...?

Peixoto: Oh, it's everybody. Everything from single stores—we do a local route where we go up to the Bay Area, and we come down through—everything from Palo Alto through Santa Cruz, where we do direct deliveries to the smaller stores, like one or two—Some stores have two, three, and there's one chain that has five stores, and the smaller natural food chains.

Farmer: Which ones?

Peixoto: We do New Leaf, Staff of Life; we do Draeger's, Piazza's [Fine Foods] up in the Bay Area, Lunardi's. There're quite a few different, smaller ones,

single-store places that we go. About thirty customers we do that way. That's about fifteen to twenty percent of our business. The rest is all wholesale, which goes to the biggest customers, Whole Foods. And then we do Albert's Organics, and distributors like Four Seasons Produce. They're distributors. And there're different regional distributors in different areas. We go to Wild Oats Markets. And there're quite a few different chains. We go to Safeway, and occasionally Albertson's and Raley's, Kroger's, quite a few different stores. They all seem to be getting into organic. There're a lot of new people on line now that really, really want to get into organic.

Farmer: You mean to buy it from you?

Peixoto: Yes. Everything changed about a year and a half ago when Wal-Mart decided to get into organic. Basically every chain in the country said, "Well, if they're getting into it, we have to get into it to compete with them. They're not just going to get into it for the fun of it." So I think basically every chain out there now is wanting to get into organic. And there're real restraints. The thing is, is the market in organic is a whole different world to live in. The chain stores are getting an education, because before, they could just go out and order whatever they wanted, fill the shelf space up, get the cheapest price and put them on the shelf, and price it however they have to. It worked. But organically, you can't always get every item every day. There're items sometimes that there's none available. We were just looking at Napa Cabbage this morning, and my brother says, "Well, geez, this is pretty ugly Napa Cabbage," and I says, "You know, Bill,

that's probably the finest Napa Cabbage in the United States today. It might be the worst, too. Come to think of it, I think it's the only."

Farmer: [Laughs.]

Peixoto: So I said, "But we're probably the only company. We have not found anybody else in the whole country that has Napa Cabbage. So our Napa Cabbage is a little bit smaller and a little bit more yellow than we like to see it, but it probably is the finest Napa Cabbage in the country."

Farmer: And can you charge more for it in moments like that?

Peixoto: Yes. And we're not afraid to charge for it because we lost the last three blocks of Napa Cabbage because of the cold weather. So we're going to try to make up for lost time. Usually most of the natural food chains, they understand the pricing goes crazy sometimes. It's not unusual for us to be three to five times the price of conventional.

Farmer: Oh, at Staff of Life there was organic asparagus and conventional right next to each other, probably two and a half to three dollars difference per bunch.

Peixoto: Oh, yes, yes.

Farmer: And I'll pick the organic just because I—

Peixoto: Yes. And most people will when they go to Staff of Life. Now, if you did the same trial in a Safeway, you probably will see the reverse. It just depends on who your market is.

Farmer: That's true in Santa Cruz, anyway: the Safeway section is growing. The organic.

Peixoto: Yes, Safeway is. They made a stab at organics about four years ago, and it was a disaster. Then they hired some organic people to run it, and now it seems to be taking hold, and they're doing this whole movement now for organic. They're advertising organic. They're pushing it.

Farmer: "Safeway-O baby food."

Peixoto: Yes. I'd normally think of organic as produce, but there's a whole other world out there.

Farmer: Oh, the processed foods, yes.

Peixoto: Yes. It's a huge market. We sell to some processors like Amy's Kitchen, and if you go into a lot of these stores, I'm shocked about how much shelf space Amy's Kitchen has. They're a little local California company, but committed to organic. They don't do any conventional. And if you go in, there's a pretty good section a lot of times in these stores of Amy's Kitchen. I just saw an order today in from Amy's Kitchen. They're looking for chard because they have to have a steady supply, and with the freeze they have to shop around. There're not that many suppliers that can supply them with the amount of green chard that they need, so they called us to try to fill that order.

But, like I say, it's a very limited amount of people. If you wanted broccoli in the state of California today, you could probably call over a hundred conventional

people. If you want organic broccoli, you have about five phone calls to make. Don't waste your time calling anybody else because all they would be doing is buying from those five people. So it's a whole different world. And, like I say, the conventional mentality has got to change a little bit to match the organic. That's why I think Wal-Mart's are really having a really frustrating time right now, trying to deal with the whole organic field. Because before, they would just pound their fist on the table and say, "We're Wal-Mart's and we want the end product." They would have people stand in line that could supply it. I think organically they're not able to do that. I think they're really frustrated with it.

Farmer: So when you were first going into organic, what was your experience with the other people, like the community of farmers, the CCOF crowd, and that kind of thing?

Peixoto: The general, conventional farmers thought I'd lost all my marbles.

Farmer: [Laughs.]

Peixoto: They thought I was nuts.

Farmer: Were they your oldest friends?

Peixoto: Yes. They thought really I'd gone off the deep end. They thought I was just flat-out crazy.

Farmer: Wow.

Peixoto: And a lot of the organic growers that had been telling me for years I should just stop spraying and get off the deal, they were kind of ticked off at me because when we transitioned, the ground we were transitioning was a hundred acres at a time. They said, "Dick, you're gonna run me outta business." I said, "Well, you guys were the guys telling us to go ahead and get into organics." [Laughter.]

Farmer: You can't win. [Laughs.]

Peixoto: Yes. So I was getting it from both sides at that point. But there's been a big swing, I'd say, in the last five years, about the average grower's mentality toward organics. I think most of them have really grown to respect it as a viable business. And frankly, to be honest with you, in the old days I saw guys farming organically, and they would go wade through the weeds, getting ready for the farmers' market on Saturday. They would wade through the weeds, and then they'd reach down, they come up: "Hey, I found a beet!" I mean, it was like this treasure island. You know, it was just like this treasure trip to go through and try to find things to harvest.

Farmer: [Laughs.]

Peixoto: Whatever they could find in that weed patch, that's what you'd end up with at the farmers' market. And they got that reputation: if you want to farm organically, you just grow a lot of weeds and just deal with it.

If we were out standing in one of our organic fields right now, I'd challenge anybody to tell me if it's organic or conventional, because we found that we need

to control our weeds, not so much for this crop but for the future crops. Because every weed we allow to go to seed could be a thousand weeds next time. Like, I had a sizeable conventional guy the other day. They were buying organic product from us. He said, "I want to go out and look at the field." So we took him out to look at the field, and he goes, "You're lying. This is not organic. This just looks too good. There's just no way. It looks better than the conventional field I just left. There's just no way." So I showed him the certification and everything. I said, "Well, look at any field you want to. Here's the planting schedule. Go look at any field you want to." They were shocked. But it didn't happen overnight. It's taken us a long time to get to that point to where we can manage the pests, and manage the fertility, and manage the weeds.

Farmer: And plus, you started out with good conventional skills, and a lot of these other guys had to learn a different way.

Peixoto: Right. I started in the weed patch.

Farmer: Yes. I remember going to the farm tour with Eco-Farm [the Ecological Farming Association] this year, and you were up there on a hill. I was wondering how you got involved with them.

Peixoto: They usually call me about every year, to either go give a talk at Asilomar [where the organization's annual conference is held] or do the bus tour. We've done the bus tour—I think it's been three times that we've done the bus tour. Sam Earnshaw is real involved in that.² He's been around our operation since we started farming organically. He was real enthused that we were making

the transition, and he's actively helped us along the way to try to learn who to talk to and things. And then Amigo Bob [Cantisano], that runs the tour—when we got into organic, it was kind of funny, because we asked for him, and they said, "Well, every business you get into, there's advisers, there's consultants you can hire." We were kind of laughing because everybody we turned to said, "Oh, you gotta hire Amigo Bob. That's the guy."³ "Who's that?" "Organic Ag Advisors. Amigo Bob. Call him up. He's the guy." So we kind of laughed about it for a while, and then pretty soon, we said, "You know what? We better go hire this guy."

Farmer: [Laughs.]

Peixoto: So we went and hired Amigo. Amigo came out, and Sam came with him. We hired him for a couple of years to help us get going, and I now I think he's taught us about everything we can learn from him. He did an excellent job for us, and I highly recommend . . . People ask me when they get into organic, "Well, who can we get to advise us?" I say, "Amigo Bob, for sure. No doubt in my mind. I highly recommend the guy. When he shows up the first time, you're not sure. He's not going to show up in a suit like a consultant normally would, but he'll impress you." He's great to work with. He's been on the Eco-Farm deal ever since it started, I think. We don't hire him anymore, but we get together with him and talk things over, back and forth. We all learn from our experiences. So that's how I got involved with Eco-Farm. I'm not actively involved in any organizing of it or anything, but they usually call us to do something.

Farmer: And did you ever go to the convention before you were actually organic farming, just to learn anything?

Peixoto: Nope, never even thought of it.

Farmer: Were there any other kinds of farming organizations that you were part of over the years?

Peixoto: I've always been a member of the Farm Bureau, and sat on the Farm Bureau board with a couple of organic guys. Actually, that was my contact for those guys, learning about what they did organically.

Farmer: Who was that?

Peixoto: Bruce Dau was one. And Mark Lipson.⁴ Yes, those are the two guys that over the years sat on the Farm Bureau board. Bruce Dau early on— I mean, I'm talking, like, whew!—man, we're talking, like, twenty years ago, when Bruce used to farm up on Ocean Street, and we used to do commercial tractor work, go disking and plowing for people. We went up there and worked some ground for him. [So that was when] I first got to meet him and look at his operation. At that time, I thought Bruce did a great job, but he could do so much better with some tools. Bruce has retired from farming now, but I think he did real well from the time that he was in it, in farming.

Farmer: What do you think the most important skills are in running this size of a farming operation?

Peixoto: The important skill probably is people management. That's the thing right there. Because if you get the right team of people doing the job, then they learn a lot along the way with you, so you don't have to be there for every step of the way. We have a production meeting every morning at six o'clock in the morning for about an hour. I meet up with the top guys—the guy that runs the tractors, the guy that runs the irrigation, the guy that runs harvesting. We meet every morning to try to work as a team to get the job done.

People don't realize . . . eight hundred acres sounds like a lot, but to put it in more tangible . . . I tell people on any given day we have five hundred blocks of produce growing out there. Each one has to be managed individually. So when you put it in that perspective, each one—it's not uncommon for us to sit down at a production meeting in the morning and talk about six beds of radishes, or eight beds of radishes. Which bed of that field is the weedy one, and why is it weedy, and how do we do better? And did you get the rows wet? Can we go plant six beds of cilantro tomorrow? Does the Mei Qing Choy have good germination or bad germination? So we go through all of these things to try to figure out how to do a better job at it as a team effort. And there again, if you can manage that team, and they can manage the people that work under them, then you got it made [and] all the other things organically that we've talked about will fall into place, because you've got the team that's watching out for you. I had a guy that worked for me for probably twenty years running my tractors in the conventional world, and he worked here until about two years ago. But near the end of his tenure here, when I would say something, he would already say, "Yes,

done," you know? "Go do this." "Oh, done." "Go do that." "I tried that, but the field's too wet." "I thought so."

Farmer: Practically reading each other's minds.

Peixoto: Yes, we were just, like, in synch so good. He's moved on. Nothing's wrong, but he just had other things in his life he wanted to do. The guy did a great job for us, and we really appreciate it. So now we've got a couple of other guys coming up through the ranks that I think they're headed that way, too. I think they'll be there in another year or two, in the same mode.

Farmer: How is it with language? Do you speak Spanish?

Peixoto: I speak pretty fluent Spanish, yes.

Farmer: Do you think that's pretty necessary?

Peixoto: Yes. [Laughs.] I only went through high school education-wise, and in high school I took a couple of years of Spanish, and goofed off and really didn't pay attention to it. As soon as I got out and started to be in farming, I was kind of shocked. I said, I should have listened because I need to know this stuff. That was kind of bad in a way, and it was kind of good in a way, because the Spanish I learned in class is a little bit different than the farm workers. So once we get out in the field, we learn a whole other language. You have better communication skills by learning their language as opposed to book language, which they don't really even understand, either, so it's [chuckles] kind of funny. But, yes, the first year or two was a real learning experience.

Farmer: I bet. Now, wouldn't you be at kind of a loss if everything had to be translated?

Peixoto: Oh, absolutely. Wouldn't have made it. The other thing, too, it's very important to communicate with the Spanish speakers in Spanish. I know of some growers that have had a real tough time in business because they don't communicate with their people, and so every time they want to say something, they got to go through a translator. The people don't have any respect for that. You lose the whole momentum along the way. Whereas if I go out and talk to a guy, I can talk to him about how's his family, his kids—are they playing soccer? A lot of times I'll give a guy a ride from one tract to the next tract. We can talk about when he's going back to Mexico, how's his ranch in Mexico. And that's important, for them to know that we have enough interest to take the time to talk to them about that. It's important. It's important to us, too, as far as keeping in contact with the people all the time.

Farmer: So it creates loyalty, I suppose.

Peixoto: Yes.

Farmer: And you have a strong workforce that way.

Labor Issues

Yes, I've had some people work for me fifteen, twenty years they've been working here. We don't pay the highest wages, but we pay fair wages, and we've

helped a lot of these guys along the way buy houses or whatever. A lot of times they need help or temporary help, whatever. We chip in to help them out.

Farmer: Yes, I was going to ask about labor. Have you had shortages this year?

Peixoto: We've had major shortages, yes. In fact, we were on the national news last year because Associated Press heard about our labor shortage and came down to do an article on one of our fields. I think that it's a compound effect. We're already starting to experience labor shortages this year because the strawberries have started up in the last couple of weeks. A lot of the workers would rather go pick strawberries, where they work eight, nine hours a day, and they kind of do the same thing, day in, day out. As opposed to our guys, a lot of times, because we're so diversified, the guy will go pick radishes for three hours; and then he'll go pick cilantro for two hours; and then he'll go pick dandelions; and then he has to go to the other end to pick parsley; and then come back over here and pick eight boxes of spinach or whatever it is. All of those, he gets paid piece rate, and he makes probably as good or more money than the strawberry guy, but it's so much easier in strawberries. You just push a cart down there and zzzhhht—you know?

Farmer: Don't have to think too much.

Peixoto: Yes, you're one of one hundred or two hundred berry pickers out there, and it's just an easier lifestyle. Raspberries, same thing, there too. Standing up, where you don't have to stoop over all day, just picking raspberries and make your money that way. And then there's times, like I said, with the weeds, where

we have to organically, we have to get on our knees and pull every weed by hand. Nobody wants to do that.

Farmer: No.

Peixoto: So the organic people, I think, are affected more than the conventional, just from that standpoint of the style of labor needs.

Farmer: People know. Word gets out that it's harder work, huh?

Peixoto: Yes. All of our piece rates are higher than the conventional guys' because of the volume that we do, and sometimes there's weeds to deal with and things like that. So we adjust all the piece rates that we pay on all the harvesting based off of conventional plus extra because it's organic.

Farmer: Are you supporting any of the legislation that's around right now, any of the ideas for immigration?

Peixoto: You know, I'm so confused by the whole thing. I can't keep track of it all, to be honest with you. It's really hard to follow. I don't know if you know, but a lot of things in Washington, when they get tied up—they go in with an idea, but by the time it comes out the other end, it has nothing to do with what the original intent was. Most of the bills I've seen are so convoluted by other issues, it's hard to see what was the original intent of this. I'm very supportive of any kind of a guest worker program. A lot of the workers that we've had over the years have gone back to Mexico, and would love to just come back, but they can't get here legally, and they don't want to pay a *coyote* five to six to eight

thousand dollars to come in. They don't have the money. So it's just kind of crazy. But any kind of a guest worker program, I think, would be a great deal for everybody. I think it would help everybody, make everybody's life easier.

The Advantages and Disadvantages of Farming on the Central Coast

Farmer: What would you say are the advantages and disadvantages of farming in this region?

Peixoto: Disadvantages are high labor costs and a high cost of living. So if you hire employees, they have to make more money because of the cost of living. Let's see, location—we're talking disadvantages first, right? Okay. Location would be a disadvantage because of truck traffic. It's kind of a one-way trip. If you get out in the San Joaquin Valley, then trucks come down Highway 5 that pull into wherever you have to ship out of and pull back on the highway, and they're anywhere between Mexico and Oregon. Over here, they have to go off the beaten track to get to us, so that would be a disadvantage. Disadvantage, too, would be on one end, the weather. We have more mildew and disease problems than anywhere else in the United States, probably, because of the weather, and the cooler climate.

The advantages. One would be the weather, because we *have* the cooler climate, so we're able to grow crops that can't grow anywhere else in the country. You can't grow cauliflower in Nebraska in the middle of summer, but we grow the most beautiful cauliflower here. We grow broccoli, Brussels sprouts, Bok Choy

now, Napa [Cabbage]. A lot of the items we grow here you can't grow anywhere else in the country. So weather would be a big advantage. Probably *the* biggest advantage would be weather.

And then, I think we get a lot more support from the community as a whole for farming sustainably in this area than we [would] if we were out in the middle of the San Joaquin Valley or something like that. Everything over there is focused on bigger farmers. Like I said, I've seen a big evolution in the last five years. A lot of people that were anti-organic now have switched around all the way to pro-organic because of what they see we *can* do. I think there was this kind of fear factor before. Are we going to have weed-infested fields, and are all the bugs going to come from your place over onto my place, and things like that. We just don't see that anymore.

Hedgerows and *E. coli*

Farmer: There is that one thing about the barriers between the ranches and the vegetable crops for the *E. coli* food safety thing.

Peixoto: Oh, yes.

Farmer: Can you talk about that a little bit?

Peixoto: Yes, it's a big issue. [Laughs.] There're so many proposals out there right now, it's hard to follow them all. But basically, right now—and this is another thing frustrating with government. The government's been telling us for the last five to ten years that we need to clean up our act as far as pesticides going into

the Monterey Bay Sanctuary, even organic pesticides and organic fertilizers and stuff like that. They want us to work on trying to keep our erosion to a minimum, and trying to keep our land on our land so there's no erosion problem and things like that. So we've signed up on these programs to put in catch basins and turf roadways and things like that to hold back the sediment.

Then in September of last year [2006] they said, "Well, you know, we've got to get rid of all of this vegetative—all this stuff around there. We want it clean from bank to bank. We don't want any vegetation—no weeds, no trees, no bushes, nothing. We want to annihilate everything around there." Which in our farming system doesn't really agree with the way we farm. Because we like to have beneficial habitat around, and we intentionally plant flowers around the fields for habitat. So there's this whole thing going on right now. I've been to several meetings, and there's going to be a lot more. They're trying to figure out, well, what *is* the best. Right now I think that people are using the cry of: it's people's lives that we're talking about. People are dying. But in reality it's not really from anything they're talking about. It's not from vegetative deals. It's not from any water tests or anything like that. They're going overboard on things that have not been pinpointed as a source. And they're not really giving any more effort to research to find out what *is* the source, and how do we prevent it from spreading?

So there again, we're in this push-pull deal, where one government agency says that if you don't clear those out and make those fields clear of all vegetation, then we're going to come in and regulate you and make you do it. And the other

[agency] over there says, if you take those out, you're going to be getting all the sediment in the Monterey Bay Sanctuary, and then you're a bad guy over here. We're just wanting to farm here in the middle. We're caught in the middle between one regulation and the next.

Farmer: I was wondering if it's affecting your relationships with neighboring farms at all.

Peixoto: Not really. I don't see it, no.

Farmer: Is it cutting into your production?

Peixoto: In some areas, yes.

Farmer: I think that's what I remember seeing on the farm tour, is you were talking about how much width [of cleared, vegetation-free margins] you had to have.

Peixoto: Right. They've narrowed that down now, but at the time of the farm tour, I think it was between fifty and a hundred feet. Now they're down to thirty feet. We can kind of live with thirty feet. Fifty to a hundred was kind of atrocious.

Farmer: Sam Earnshaw really wants the hedgerows to stay.⁵

Peixoto: Yes.

Farmer: That's a big deal.

Peixoto: He's been fighting for that. As a matter of fact, he got a deal from the Farm Bureau. We're going to talk to him on that, with Focus Ag here later this week. Me and Sam were talking at that class. Focus Ag is where we kind of educate the public. I think there's about fifteen or twenty people that signed up. A lot more people sign up, and they take fifteen or twenty people. They put them through a nine-month educational process. They're going to have a Food Safety Day, I think this Thursday or something, where they're going to go out and tour some farms in Salinas. They're going to talk to the researchers, and talk to different people. At the end of the day, we're going to have a deal with Sam, myself, and Chris Goodman, and we're going to talk about these buffers and who they affect—the danger, *E. coli* coming from those. People are just overreacting right now.

Farmer: But it could turn into regulation. That's the problem.

Peixoto: Absolutely, yes. Absolutely. But it won't really be anything based off of science. It'll only be based off of fear.

Water Issues

Farmer: Yes. Do you think climate change is affecting your farm?

Peixoto: No.

Farmer: Is it, like, the cycles just have happened forever?

Peixoto: Yep. I've thought that a lot of times, but I just don't see it. It just seems like we go through cold cycles, and then warm cycles, and rainy cycles, and dry

cycles. Now that I've been farming for, what, thirty-two years, it just seems to go through these cycles. I don't know. You think it's getting this way and it'll go that way, so—

Farmer: [Laughs.]

Peixoto: Yes, I don't see it.

Farmer: I guess when it's dry, like they're talking about, you have to irrigate more, and so the cost of water goes up.

Peixoto: Oh, absolutely, yes. The farm that Lakeside Organics was founded on is on a lake. And that lake in the seventies, we started farming there, and we actually pumped the lake dry and farmed the lake bottom itself one year, it was so dry. That was, like, '76, '77. We were in a seven- or eight-year drought at that point. And the compound effect of that lake going down each year, to the point where we were pumping out of that for our water. We pumped the lake dry. There was nothing left of it. So we went in and farmed the lake because it was good ground.

Farmer: Well, do you worry about water as an issue?

Peixoto: Yes, yes. I worry about two things. I worry about water shortage, and I worry about the cost of water. Both are very much related. That's a whole other different issue we talk about in this area. We've run several campaigns against the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency because they are playing on "save agriculture" and "save agriculture from salt water intrusion. We need to solve

the problem.” And the signs on the other side say, “Save agriculture from the cost of water.” And the two are intertwined. The agency doesn’t really seem to— they just feel “we need to solve the problem. Like, we’re here to solve the problem. Whatever it is, it is. If it’s a million dollars an acre foot, that’s it.” Like I’ve said for years, their job is to keep every farmer in business. Don’t run anybody out of business with the high cost of water, because the first guy that goes out, the next guy next to him has got to pay more for *his* water. And each guy you run out of business actually uses less water. There’s less and less water being used, the higher the cost of water; less and less water being used. I think we’ve done tremendous strides on solving the water problem in this area, just from the cost of water. Remember I talked earlier about the furrow water. They used to flood the fields until they were black. Well, on furrow water we’d usually use, like, one acre foot. Now we grow the whole crop on less than one acre foot. So we’ve made tremendous strides. But the agency doesn’t really see it that way. As time has gone on [they say]: “Our problem is getting worse, it’s getting worse, it’s getting worse.” Well, I know we use substantially less water today than we did ten years ago.

Farmer: Just from efficiency and the way you irrigate.

Peixoto: Oh, yes. I think we’re at twenty-five, thirty percent less water than we did ten years ago.

Farmer: And I guess you have to be.

Peixoto: Yes. But the other problem is, is they keep developing more of Watsonville, which creates more demand. Like, right now they've got this wastewater treatment plant they're bringing on line to help the farmers, but it's [a] city of Watsonville project that's going to be owned by the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency. So everybody's going to pay for this project, but the city's going to get credits because they're supplying us with all this water. I don't want to use that water on my organic crops. I don't even know if legally I can do it.

Farmer: Because it's coming from the sewage water?

Peixoto: Yes. When I read the USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture] standards, it says you cannot use anything that comes from human waste, period.

Farmer: Right, sewage sludge.

Peixoto: It doesn't matter if it's recycled, cleaned up, or anything else. You can't use it. And they say, "Oh, well, they checked with CCOF [California Certified Organic Farmers]. They checked with them, and they said 'Oh, yes, you can.'" I said, "Well, I don't know about that." I'm not even sure if CCOF can make that interpretation because the USDA is very specific. It says, "No, you cannot." But the overall issue there is that the city is now getting the right to build more houses because they're supplying water, and so they're getting water credits by giving us crappy water. The farmers are going to use the water, theoretically, and the city can now pump more water out of the basin, based off of—what?

The whole water [issue] is a mess. What they're doing with that water project, I don't even think it's legal because they are here to solve the water problem, and the only water that they're giving us now is they're taking water from the wastewater treatment plant at 1,100 parts per million, and they're blending that with water we're pumping out of the ground at 400 parts per million to make water that's, like, 750 parts per million. So if the water was 400 parts per million, and they're now blending it, making it 750, aren't they degrading the water source in the valley? It seems to me that they are not doing what the charter says they're supposed to do, which is improve the water quality in the Pajaro Valley. They're actually making it worse. And the whole driving force behind that is to give the city the right to build more houses and use more water.

Farmer: Yes.

Peixoto: That's my opinion. I don't know. I've just got a different opinion.

Urbanization (part two)

Farmer: Yes. I was going to ask you if suburbanization is encroaching on your farming.

Peixoto: It's a huge issue. One of the first things I talked in our interview is how the whole environment has changed. Like, we have ranches out right along Seascape Resort out there. It's one of the last farm pieces of land before you hit Aptos. People who have been around forever understand. But a lot of those people are from out of the area, and they don't have a clue. They even complain about the noise of the sprinklers. They say, "Do you know what it's like to go to

sleep at night listening to chhittt, chhitt, chhitt, chhitt all night long? Do you know?" "Yes, I do. I was raised around those." "Yes, but I'm not used to it." One guy told me—he said, "You guys don't have a farm out here. You got a food factory. You're producing food." He said, "It has nothing to do with farming. I said, "Well, that's a different way of looking at it."

Farmer: [Laughs.]

Peixoto: But, yes, urbanization—right down to tractors going down the road, people get ticked off. Drivers say, "I got to make an appointment. You damn guys are in my way. Get outta my way." We've had several issues with cars and vehicles on the road. Mud on the road. That's another thing people say: "Geez, can't you wash your tires off?" "Well, yeah, if you want your food to cost twice as much."

Farmer: [Laughs.]

Peixoto: Every time we go off of a dirt road onto a paved road, mud comes off the tires. It's just byproduct. People get ticked off, and I understand that, but we can't wash our tires every time we go off the road. They think we can.

Farmer: It's that sanitized-society kind of thing.

Peixoto: Yes, there we go again, yes.

Farmers' Markets and CSAs

Farmer: Do you have anything to do with any of the farmers' markets?

Peixoto: Not anymore. I used to. When we started Lakeside Organics, that was our whole idea. We were going to start off by going to the farmers' markets. We started to. For the first year, we tried and tried and just couldn't get enough volume from any of them. A lot of the smaller growers already had people locked up that would go there every year, so we just didn't go in there. But that's one thing I've thought about. There's a whole movement. As I said, we are fairly successful now because we've reached a level where Whole Foods will buy from us, and Safeway will buy from us. But a lot of the smaller ones, I give those guys a lot of credit because they've actually adjusted their operation to do more farmers' markets, and a lot of them have done this CSA [community supported agriculture] deal, which I think is a fantastic deal. I think more people should know about what that's all about because that really saved a lot of small farmers from being out of business. I know personally, three or four that we work close with, that farm next to us or we trade product around things that—

Farmer: Do they ever fill their orders by getting stuff from you?

Peixoto: Yes, yes, sometimes. And when they do, they put it in their flyer: "We were out of rutabagas this week, so we got some rutabagas from Lakeside Organics, and they're in your box." Right now they're having a hell of a time because of the spring freeze deal. It really killed them, and we've learned things. Our broccoli right now looks as good as it could in the middle of summer, but their broccoli got killed, I mean, literally killed, dead. And broccoli is a big item for them, so they're buying broccoli from us to put in their box and supply that. So we work with them all the time. We're happy to work with them, and they're

great people. I can't say enough good things about what they do. Some of those guys are serving a thousand people and actually turning away people because they can't keep up with it all. I've been really impressed with that. On a small farmer deal, that's as good as they could do.

Farmer: Well, great. Thank you so much for your time here.

¹ In August 2006, a load of organic baby spinach from the Paicines Ranch in San Benito County contaminated with *E. coli* 0157:H7 was mixed in with several other batches of spinach being processed and packed into six-ounce bags. Within a few weeks, over two hundred people fell ill, and many ended up in the hospital. Two elderly women and a young child died from acute kidney failure. Six months after the outbreak, a coalition of large farmers released the California Leafy Greens Handler Marketing Agreement, the ecological and economic effects of which are discussed by some of our narrators.

² See the oral history with Sam Earnshaw in this series.

³ See the oral history with Amigo Bob Cantisano in this series.

⁴ See the oral history with Mark Lipson in this series.

⁵ See Sam Earnshaw, "Hedgerows for California Agriculture: A Resource Guide," (Community Alliance with Family Farmers, 2004). www.caff.org/programs/farmscaping/Hedgerow.pdf
Also see the oral history with Sam Earnshaw and Jo Ann Baumgartner in this series.