

UC Santa Cruz

Cultivating A Movement

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Drew Goodman, Earthbound Farm

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Drew Goodman



Photo by Tom O'Neal

CEO, Earthbound Farm

Drew Goodman is CEO and co-founder, with his wife, Myra, of Earthbound Farm, based in San Juan Bautista, California. Two years after its 1984 inception on 2.5 Carmel Valley acres, Earthbound became the first successful purveyor of pre-washed salads bagged for retail sale. The company now produces more than 100 varieties of certified organic salads, fruits, and vegetables on a total of about 33,000 acres, with individual farms ranging from five to 680 acres in California, Arizona, Washington, Oregon, Mexico, Canada, and Chile. Earthbound Farm currently distributes its products to more than

seventy percent of all US supermarkets—among them Costco, Wal-Mart, Safeway, and Albertsons—and to some international markets.

In a single year, by Earthbound's reckoning, organic production on this scale averts the use of more than 305,000 pounds of toxic and persistent pesticides and 10.3 million pounds of synthetic fertilizers, conserving about 1.6 million gallons of petroleum and significantly reducing the company's carbon footprint. Through other conservation measures, Earthbound estimates that it also diverts more than a million pounds of solid waste from landfills annually, in addition to saving trees, water, and energy and avoiding thousands of tons of greenhouse gas emissions.

Drew and Myra Goodman grew up in the same Manhattan neighborhood, but made their first significant connection at a Grateful Dead concert while they were both attending college in California. Drew majored in Environmental Studies at UC Santa Cruz, while Myra earned her bachelor's degree in the political economy of industrialized societies at UC Berkeley. After graduating, the couple embarked on what they envisioned as a single year of farming in Carmel Valley—before moving on, or so they thought at the time, to other careers.

The story of the Goodmans' whirlwind journey from novice backyard raspberry farmers to leaders of the world's largest grower and shipper of organic produce has been widely reported. In this interview, conducted on April 22 (Earth Day), 2009, at Earthbound's marketing and communications office in Carmel, California, Sarah Rabkin asked Drew Goodman to talk about some less publicized aspects of his career and philosophy, including his experiences at UC Santa Cruz and his thoughts about the benefits and drawbacks of large-scale organic production and distribution.

Additional Resources

Earthbound Farm website: <http://www.ebfarm.com/>

Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: a Natural History of Four Meals*. (Penguin Press, 2006). (see Chapter Nine, “Big Organic.”)

Jennifer McNulty, “Alum Brings Organic Produce into the Mainstream,” *UCSC Currents* magazine, November 8, 2004.

Samuel Fromartz, *Organic, Inc.: Natural Foods and How They Grew* (Harcourt Books, 2006).

Beginnings

Rabkin: This is Wednesday, April 22, 2009—Earth Day—and I’m in Carmel talking with Drew Goodman of Earthbound Farm. This is Sarah Rabkin. And Drew, I’m going to start with the basic questions that I begin with, with everybody in these interviews: when and where were you born?

Goodman: I was born March 24, 1960, in Buffalo, New York.

Rabkin: And where did you grow up?

Goodman: I grew up in New York City. We moved from Buffalo in 1967. We moved to Manhattan. And I lived there until 1978, when I moved to college at UC Santa Cruz.

Rabkin: Great. Before we jump ahead to college, tell me a little bit about your schooling through high school.

Goodman: I went to a very progressive private school in New York City that is now defunct. It was called New Lincoln School. It was on 110th Street and Central Park South. I spent two years in the public school system in New York City, and then spent the rest of my elementary school and high school at New Lincoln.

Rabkin: And did you start getting interested in farming, or organic agriculture, or business before you went off to college?

Goodman: No. I really did not think very much about where my food came from. Agriculture was not—though we would sometime in the summer leave New York and visit a farmstand, or eat fresh food—it really wasn't on my radar at all, I would say. My parents and then my father (because my parents divorced pretty soon after I moved to Manhattan) had a business that had really started in our home. They had an art gallery, and in the late 1960s it still operated in the home. So I think there was a fusing together of business and life; business was part of life, which I think is relevant today. But as it relates to agriculture, or a specific interest in business, I really didn't have much exposure or driving force in those areas.

Rabkin: What was your family's relationship with food and eating like?

Goodman: My father really liked to eat and always has had twenty pounds he wanted to lose. And my mother loved to cook and was very interested in different foods that my father didn't really like. So I was lucky. From an early age I tried a lot of things. My parents liked to travel. I had an uncle that lived in Europe and we'd visit him. So I didn't have a sheltered food existence. Probably relative to those times, I was pretty lucky.

UC Santa Cruz

Rabkin: How did you find out about UC Santa Cruz, and what made you want to go there?

Goodman: When my parents separated, my mother lived in California. I visited a few times. She lived in Los Angeles, and then the Bay Area. So at the time that it was time to decide about college, I knew that I wanted to get out of New York, have a different experience. I didn't really want to do what my friends were thinking of, going to some kind of East Coast private school and go into banking or business. I was convinced I wanted to go to California to go to university, really because I'd visited there and just kind of wanted a change. And UC Santa Cruz was (not that this is the best way to pick a college, but) from a natural beauty standpoint one of the nicest places I'd ever seen. I don't want to over-embellish (that's kind of my wife's job), but it was kind of love at first sight. The only problem was that my father was very enamored with Stanford, which I also applied to. My father was a very supportive figure in my life, especially after my parents divorced, and I didn't really want to disappoint him. But by the same token, I wasn't going to do what he wanted me to do. So when I got rejected from Stanford, it was great that decision was made for me. So then I was able to go to UCSC.

Rabkin: And no love lost.

Goodman: Right. The conflict was avoided.

Rabkin: Yes, great. And how did you decide to major in environmental studies?

Goodman: Probably a combination of process of elimination, and the reason that drew me to UCSC: the environment. There was a reason I wanted that. I wanted to get out of New York and come to California, it being so beautiful. You have the forest there and the farm and the ocean. You would really, from my perspective, have to not be paying attention not to hear nature calling out so loudly there. I just started taking some classes and they were interesting to me, and continued.

Rabkin: What classes or teachers in particular do you remember as most interesting or evocative for you?

Goodman: I remember Richard Merrill.¹ I think he was guest lecturing because he was at Cabrillo College. I don't have a lot of specific memories of, hey, here's a teacher that inspired me. It's a kind of much more of general feeling. I took some classes in agroecology from Steve Gliessman², worked on a greenhouse project down at the Farm and Garden. I mean, it was really kind of a smorgasbord of different classes in that vein which is now described as sustainability. I wasn't specifically interested in farming. I wasn't specifically interested in alternative energy. I think the nice thing about UCSC at the time was the alternative types of thought were kind of the mainstream. So if you're there, why not take Birth of a Poet and Native American Pottery. I think it was more of a: why not? Because it's not like I wanted to be an engineer, and if I did I'm not sure I would have ended up at UCSC.

Life Lab Internship

Rabkin: Tell me about the Life Lab internship that you did.

Goodman: My recollection of the Life Lab project was that the three of us that worked on it, really, when given the opportunity to do something and then write about it, or just write something for the senior thesis, wanted to do the former versus the latter. So from my perspective I was just itching to go do something and not just go research something and then give my opinion about it. We [at Earthbound] haven't been shy about doing things that maybe we don't know exactly how to do, or what to do before we do them. I think it was about that. There were some people who were very excited about putting in school gardens and selling the [vegetables]. This was before farmers' markets became really popular. I think we sold the stuff to Shopper's Corner and a few little markets.

Rabkin: And who was "we"? Who was the group working on this?

Goodman: It was Naomi Barretts and Laura, I don't remember her last name. But it was the three of us.

Rabkin: And you were all seniors working on a senior thesis project?

Goodman: Yes.

Rabkin: And what school were you working at?

Goodman: We were working at Live Oak School.

Rabkin: And what kind of work were you doing there with the school garden?

Goodman: We dug some raised beds and planted them with the kids. The whole thing was almost like a little mini-economics. It was a little math project, where we went in and then we sold the produce, and the money cycled back into the

school garden program. It was linking up the science interest in farming with the economic need of sustaining and then branching out into— it's a long time ago, but I'm sure that was twelve bunches of beets then got monetized into something. I don't really know where they went with that, but what we were trying to do was create something that wasn't just relying on a donation. That's my main recollection of the project.

Rabkin: How did you learn to dig raised beds and that sort of thing?

Goodman: It's not that scientific. It's not that complicated. Probably by watching someone do it while I was working at the Farm and Garden, working on the greenhouse there. Like all farming it's done out in the open, and if you want to borrow a technique from the [UCSC] Farm and Garden, or from Earthbound, all you got to do is go look for it.

Rabkin: So you didn't have a ton of gardening experience at this point. You were learning as you went along?

Goodman: Yes, I think that's probably a recurring theme for us in the development of Earthbound. It was more that this was one of the beginning school garden projects. We were excited to be involved with that, and not that worried that we didn't have expertise conferred upon us that we were the best gardeners or marketers or educators. We were just trying to pitch in.

Rabkin: Did you have teachers or mentors in the Life Lab program you were working with?

Goodman: I remember Robbie Jaffe³ was very enthusiastic about the program. It was her baby. She was the instructor.

Rabkin: How about collegiate relationships, classmate relationships, roommate relationships at UCSC. Were there any that were especially important in terms of your interest in farming, gardening? Any that have persisted?

Goodman: Naomi is still a very good friend of ours, the woman I did the project with. And there are a couple of people not really around farming that are still integral parts of our lives. But there wasn't really anything specific. I think the interest in farming really started at the Farm and Garden, and going to UCSC in the first place, and just getting out of Manhattan and getting into a more natural environment. It evolved organically from there.

Rabkin: So to speak.

Goodman: Pun intended. This would probably be a good time to mention Mark Lipson⁴, who has gone on to be a very influential character in policy and making organic what it is today. We were housemates, I think it was one summer, or it may have continued into a school year. I didn't really know what Mark was working on. We were just friendly housemates. I wasn't that clued in to the research he was doing. It was really later that I began to appreciate all his hard work and influence. But he was a great housemate and a really enjoyable friend, and we are still in contact today, although he is leading a busy life, as are we. He's probably one of the more—a relationship that has kind of remained constant. Now in Earthbound's business in organic agriculture we intersect a lot.

Rabkin: Have you had cause to communicate with him in relation to his work at the Organic Farming Research Foundation [OFRF]? Do the two of you communicate professionally these days because of his research work?

Goodman: We are supporters of OFRF and what they do. I think most of the business interaction is really with Bob Scowcroft.⁵ Mark spends more time in Washington, D.C. When I do get talk to Mark and see him it's always a pleasure. But most of our ongoing interaction is really with Bob, unless Mark has something specific that he wants my perspective on, which happens less often than we interact with Bob.

Rabkin: Before we move on from your UCSC days, is there anything else you'd like to say about that time?

Goodman: UCSC delivered what I was looking for. I was looking for a change in my environment. They provided the type of education that I was looking for, and in general the faculty that I interacted with were much more interested in helping students learn how to think, than learn how to memorize things and repeat. I can't speak from any other educational experience, because my high school was kind of like that too, but it would appear that I have learned those lessons fairly well in terms of how they've been applied professionally. So that was good. That was what I was looking for and I think the university delivered.

Rabkin: You and Myra have gone on now to sponsor some scholarships for the Environmental Studies Department at UC Santa Cruz. Can you talk a little bit about your motivation to do that, and what you hope that achieves?

Goodman: Well, I think that UCSC, for a number of reasons, was an early adopter of some of the things that are important to us, and have become important to us. We wanted to help sustain that. Obviously, organic food and farming are important to us. And now it seems to be important to a lot of other people, which we think is real progress, and we would like to see more interested people, especially those who may not have the wherewithal but have the interest, apply themselves in that area.

Earthbound Farm

Rabkin: Great, thank you. So there's a theme developing here having to do with learning on the fly, learning as you go, being willing to try new things and take risks. I'd like to pick that theme up and move it on to your experiences with Earthbound. The big story about how you and Myra started with a backyard raspberry plot and ended up with this big company is pretty widely told. But I am interested in, as that growth occurred, how you managed to acquire the skills and knowledge that you needed to end up being in charge of such a large, complex business. So I'm wondering, as the business has grown, what have been some of the obstacles you've had to overcome in terms of your own learning curve, and what have been some of the sources of your learning.

Goodman: I think "ended up running this large company" is probably very accurate. I don't think we aspired to have a really big business, or prior to embarking on it acquired the normal skills which people think they need to do that. It's really just been an evolution. I would say one of our better attributes is we just have common sense. We obviously have a passion for what we do, and

kind of a—I don't want to say relentless—but we don't take no for an answer very easily. We're not easily deterred and discouraged, and that is probably one of the themes that has been a hallmark of our evolving to run this large company and not being scared of what it is we don't know, and afraid that we can't do it. I think a lot of it is: how do you approach it. Can you do this because you think you can, or are you afraid that you can't? I think that that lack of fear of failure might have been more of a skill than kind of knowing, going in, what the specific metrics or economic needs were, and where are we now and where do we want to go.

It's very challenging being in the mainstream food business and having a company now the size of Earthbound. I'm not sure, had we known where we were going, that we wouldn't have been afraid of what we didn't know and would have— Earthbound has evolved and I think has helped, hopefully, be an example for others in this mainstreaming of good organic food. Now it's getting a lot of attention for being large, but really at the time we were just putting one foot in front of the other and figuring out how to get around, or over, or under the obstacle in front of us. It was really, I'm just guessing, five or six years after we started a little backyard farm that we realized we were in this business. We were just kind of going along and doing what we thought needed to be done next.

Rabkin: I wonder if you could think of an example to make this a little bit more specific? Like, can you think of a moment that might have been terminally daunting for you and Myra if you didn't have this kind of determination and

tenacity. What was a challenge that really broadsided you, or that you really had to rise to meet?

Goodman: Well, I think one of the early moments, after getting the one-day tutorial on how to run the raspberry farm (and I didn't take any notes or anything), I woke up the next morning and opened the shed where they had the fertilizers and the pesticides. I've always had a very keen sense of smell. I took one sniff and then shut the door. I was afraid to even go there. So we had to figure out how to do this another way. This was pre-Internet. I think the *Sunset Garden* book was what we used, and some local nurseries.

But I would say one of those moments where we had to push on, after we had branched out into growing some baby greens, we were growing for the most popular restaurant in Carmel. They were, I'm guessing, taking at the time half our production, which at the time was probably a half an acre of greens. These greens mature very quickly. You probably have about a four- or five-day window to sell them. And one day, as we called for the order, as we did every day, we found out that the chef had been fired the night before, and the new person wanted to use their own sources, and we were no longer going to be selling to that restaurant. So we pretty much lost half of our business, and had a few days to figure out what to do.

And what we had done, which you might have seen in some of the histories of the company, is we were pretty much working dawn to dusk and didn't have time to, when we came in at night, or didn't have the energy, to wash and dry the greens we were growing. So what we had done was we started every Sunday

we would go out and pick them, and wash enough for the whole week, and put them in these separate bags. And we were remarking, prior to this event with the chef, that wouldn't it be great if you could actually go buy this, because these were still really fresh and really good on the Saturday from the Sunday before.

So when we realized that we had pretty much lost most of our business, as we were sitting around thinking about what we were going to do next, one of these bags was on the table. We had filled a salad bowl with one of the contents, and looked at it and looked at one another and said, "Well, maybe we should try this." So we went up to San Francisco. This is kind of elemental to the sequence of events that have led Earthbound to where it is today. We went up to this chain of stores—it was the Real Food Company and a couple of other stores—and we talked to the produce people, and showed them the bags, and they said that they would try them on a guaranteed sale basis. And then coming back we realized, well, okay, well now we need to pack some up for other people, and did that.

It was probably a week later (I was delivering two or three days a week up to San Francisco from Carmel) and I realized, sitting in traffic one day that, oh, my God, we're in this business! All of a sudden I'm delivering to San Francisco. I hadn't thought about that when we decided to go up there to try and sell it, but it just so happened that now we were delivering to San Francisco. That didn't last long. I think we found a trucking company to haul it up after it did start selling, and we were starting to chase the demand for this product for quite a while.

Rabkin: You said earlier that you had not originally intended, necessarily, to become the runner of a big business, or to be part of what you referred to as "the

mainstream food business.” And you said that it’s hard, in some ways, to be engaged in that business. Can you elaborate on that? What are the challenges?

Goodman: Well, Earthbound is committed to providing organic food and organic fruits and vegetables today to people where they shop. Ninety percent of the food or more is bought at the supermarket. And most of the companies that own supermarkets are multi-billion-dollar companies, and most of the companies that sell to them are multi-billion-dollar companies. We’re not. And even though we are substantially bigger than the ten-acre or fifty-acre farm next door, it’s challenging operating in an environment where everyone is so much larger.

We’re trying to get organic on the shelf to compete with conventional, and to be a reasonable alternative for the consumer. I think for quite a while that was, I don’t want to say fruitless, but people were just not that interested in how their food was grown, unlike now where people are hyper-curious about where it’s grown, and who grows it, and how it’s grown. It is, I think, one of the things that Earthbound has been successful in doing. We had this personal belief that organic was better, mainly from our fear, or lack of desire for putting this [chemical pesticides and fertilizers] on our own food that we were growing in our own backyard. But I think doing this in this area in Central California where there’s a lot of conventional vegetable production, and a lot of very mechanized harvest, and techniques that have been perfected to cool the product, to make sure that it’s fresh on the supermarket shelves—we had this belief that if you applied some of these same principles to organic you would be able to get a product side-by-side to conventional in the supermarket that was much more

competitive in price, without borrowing all these techniques that had been invented for the conventional industry.

Now, most of these things were invented for iceberg lettuce, and then romaine lettuce. There wasn't really anything for what's now called the spring mix, or baby greens, that was really the hallmark of what started Earthbound. And when we brought that product to market, the vast majority of people were interested in "the product" still not as much as how it was grown. It would have been very easy to just do it conventionally, which would have been easier and cheaper.

Rabkin: How would have growing conventionally have been easier and cheaper?

Goodman: Well, there wasn't very much organic land. There was this huge land base, and many growers that were farming conventionally and it would just have been a matter of—

Rabkin: Plugging into an infrastructure that already existed.

Goodman: Yes, exactly. It really wasn't— it seems like it's five years ago; it could be seven—but it hasn't been for very long that people have appreciated organic. I think that Earthbound persisted because of our own belief that it was better. There would have been plenty of economic incentives to not do this organically if we were going to be competing in mainstream food. And the message from the buyers, and the food service people, and the chefs was: "We want good quality and a good price, and how you get there is really not that critical to us."

The Local Food Movement

Rabkin: So you talked about this sea change in public perception, and the degree of public interest in where food comes from, and how it's grown. The newest wave of that, it seems to me, is the interest, not only in whether pesticides are being applied, but also whether the food is being grown "locally."

Goodman: Yes.

Rabkin: How is that affecting the way you think about Earthbound, or the way that the public responds to your product? Have you seen any affects of that change in perception?

Goodman: Well, I think that there is a very vocal group that is shining the light on local production, which I think is a really important component of the food system that's been kind of forgotten in everyone's desire to have the cheapest food possible. The consumer has been trained to buy the lowest cost product. I think local organic production systems are great. My problem with how local has evolved in this argument is that there are some that are putting so much focus on only the fossil fuel used in transporting food. That would make local conventional seem to be superior to organic that might have been shipped from two hundred, five hundred, a thousand miles away, which I just think is doing a disservice to sustainable food production—because the benefits of organic which are very well documented in terms of the improvement of soil health, environmental health, have taken a little bit of a backseat to perception about shipping product.

In this global economy, what does local mean? Is it North America? Is it the U.S.? Is it from your state? That's a very complex issue. I'm glad people are thinking about how their food is produced. And if it gets some of them thinking that organic might be a reasonable choice, that's really a good thing. I think that it's always nice to buy from the grower that just picked it. I just want to make sure that that grower didn't just spray it before they just picked it. I think that the debate has gotten a little confused there. It's good that there's a debate, but I see the downside of that. And I'm curious to see how that unfolds.

Organic is Scale Neutral

Rabkin: In some conversations about what constitutes organic agriculture—I mean, there's strictly what constitutes legally certified organic agriculture. And then there are some voices that say there are certain kinds of growing practices—like diversification of crops within a relatively small area—that you might have to sacrifice in order to grow on a large scale, although it's still technically organic. Do you feel like you've had to sacrifice any of the principles that you see as essential to organic? Or do you feel like growing organic on a large scale does not sacrifice any of the benefits of organic agriculture?

Goodman: I think organic is completely scale neutral. To grow on a large scale you need to have habitat for beneficial insects, you need to rotate your crops, you need to be very mindful of those core principles. And it doesn't matter if you're planting five beds or five acres. Those are the principles. So I just disagree, which is okay, that the farming system is compromised in any way with high-quality, large-scale organic production. I think what's most important is that the scale of

the operation meets the scale of the market they're trying to reach. So Earthbound doesn't go to the farmers' market. That would be inappropriate. Earthbound is built to sell to supermarket or food service buyers. But at the end of the day, organic is organic, and those core principles need to be followed whether you're growing five beds, or five acres, or fifty acres.

Challenges for the Future

Rabkin: I'm doing time triage here. We have about fifteen minutes left, and I have several questions I'd like to ask you. I'm wondering what you see as the major sea changes in process now in this landscape that you're working in, in food production, organic food production. What are the changes coming down the pike? What do you see as the arising challenges and opportunities for organic produce?

Goodman: One of the changes we've seen at the retail level has been this shift from significant disinterest [among] many of the major retailers, to extreme interest in organic, to the extent that they want to have their own private label. And you see many of the major chains with their own private label of organic produce. And fitting that into the overall scheme of things, and into our company's scheme of things, is different than it was when we were selling everything under the Earthbound label. I think there's a lot of talk in terms of the food-service and restaurant community's interest in having more sustainable menu choices, and that pretty much conflicts with the pure economics of every penny mattering. The attitude is not dissimilar to how some in retail used to perceive it. The attitude is: when organic is the same price, then I will switch.

And organic is a more expensive production method. As long as you don't count any of the impact of nitrogen runoff into streams and oceans, or the impacts that some of these chemicals have on wildlife, human health, all that—as long as that is zero dollars—then organic is more expensive. That is a challenge.

I think at the end of the day everyone is mindful about how they spend their money. I think the good news is people are understanding more and more how much their vote or their choice with their dollars impacts things. We're seeing a lot of people interested in organic, which is making more companies respond; and there's more production, and it's becoming more popular. It's kind of like getting the snowball to roll down the hill, and that's really what's happening with the organic category today.

Rabkin: Are there particular cultural or economic developments that you see as key in having started this snowball rolling, including Earthbound itself? How has the public perception about food changed over this last decade or so?

Goodman: Oh, there are many self-proclaimed experts that could answer that way better than I can. I think that people realize that they should care, or they should think about it. And in doing so, once they have thought about it and made a choice, that actually moves the system along. You see the huge popularity of farmers' markets. I'm sure there's great increase in local production. And we see that. Canada—we sell a lot of product to Canada. They are fiercely proud of things that are Canadian-grown. And Canadians also on a per capita basis eat much more fresh produce than people in the U.S. So when it's in season in Canada, our sales drop. And as long as you plan for that in your

business, that's okay. And I think people taking ownership of what they feed themselves and their family, and then taking ownership of investigating, just like you would investigate before you buy a house or a car—being mindful of those smaller purchases and the ripple effect when each person makes a change, and then tells their friend, or explains to their kids, those ripples can become significant. That's really what we've been seeing all along, and the pace of that change is increasing as there is more and more information out there on the health and environmental benefits of organic, and there's more product of an equal or better quality to conventional in the marketplace at an equal to or reasonable price. The confluence of all that is making that snowball pick up speed and get a lot bigger.

Rabkin: What have been the surprises for you in this wild ride you've been on over the past twenty-five or thirty years?

Goodman: (laughs) Oh, nothing surprises me anymore. But that being said, I am surprised about how the information network works around information, true or false, about the food system. Technology has been increasing the pace of change. It surprises me a little bit, but I understand it, how a small, vocal minority— You kind of asked the question: are organic methods scale neutral or not? It surprises me a little bit to hear now that organic has a standard, and there's some effective organic production out there, that maybe it's not good enough. Do we need something else? The organic system is defined. It works. It's been working for hundreds of years, well before the advent of many of these chemicals which are now very popular in our production system.

But really nothing surprises me anymore. It's interesting to see how things evolve. We have really stuck to our guns as far as believing that organic is important and should be side-by-side with conventional. If consumers have the information, or seek out the information, and that is a good choice for them, they should be able to get it wherever they are buying their food. We have opted to try and be in the supermarket and have a more large-scale system. It is important to have large-scale, and small-scale, and national, and local. Though local is very romanticized right now, many local areas have a very short growing season, and I don't think that people want to eat root vegetables all winter (nothing against root vegetables). But, more important, and I think what's coming, is an interest in nutrition and looking at some of the dietary impacts of what we eat and what happens. This isn't an organic and conventional thing. But I do think that that will, hopefully, favor producers—large, small, local, national—of fresh vegetables, because people in the U.S. should be eating a lot more of them.

Rabkin: Are there any aspects of this work that keep you up at night?

Goodman: I think that if it wasn't as consuming, and it was possible to not sleep— (laughter) But it's tiring. It's a very challenging industry. You are working with Mother Nature here. I forget who said Mother Nature bats last. But you are constantly challenged by the weather, the marketplace, pests, diseases. And I really think that, at least personally, if I chose to stay up all night on any one thing, I would never sleep. I'd have to do something else.

Though we have a belief in organic, farming is hard work. Anyone who chooses that as a profession is choosing a very challenging profession. Just because

someone grows conventional they're still contributing to feeding everyone, and working very hard. It's not like there's really anything wrong with that. The hope is that as they see organic being part of the portfolio of product, hopefully they start growing some organic. In our company we've seen some people who have made that switch from conventional production on a large scale, to organic production on a large scale, and are growing less conventional, and are eating less conventional. It doesn't really matter where you start; it kind of matters where you finish. But it's challenging. You realize that as much as you try and be in control of production, it kind of controls you.

Rabkin: Drew, I realize you have to catch a plane. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you'd like to address in our last three or four minutes?

Goodman: I think we've really covered most of it. In this era today where there's this debate about large and small in organic, I think it's really important to be inclusive instead of exclusive. I really believe that large producers such as Earthbound and Cal Organics, two companies that are actually celebrating their 25th year in the organic business this year in 2009, have helped a lot of the smaller producers, and helped raise this awareness of organic. There's this division between big and small that's really not helping. To me, the debate is about sustainable, or in our case organic production, versus non-organic production. It takes large producers, small producers—it takes everyone to move that ball so that it starts rolling down the hill. I would like to see the “big is bad” group come together and drop that, because I don't think it's helping the cause as much as these people could. But I'm busy trying to chip away at conventional's dominance in the marketplace, and I don't really lose a lot of sleep (to that last

question) over it. But I do look forward to a day when people are embracing organic. It's organic versus conventional, not a "local versus national," or "big versus small" debate. It's logical to me that that will be forthcoming, it's just not here now.

Rabkin: And you see big as equally sustainable as small?

Goodman: Yes. Big is necessary for the way our food system is constructed, and where people buy their food, and how the distribution occurs. I don't think it can happen without big. I think big can make a lot of positive impact as far as pounds of pesticide not applied, pounds of fertilizer not used, gallons of fuel not used. When you add that up, especially across the 30,000 acres that Earthbound farms organically, it's huge. I mean, the numbers are astronomical. I don't think that that is appreciated in the debate. I think that our food system, and how it's delivered, and what we expect to pay for it, is predicated on the participation of big companies.

Rabkin: Anything else?

Goodman: No, that's probably a good place to end.

Rabkin: Thank you very much.

Goodman: Sure, thank you.

¹ See the oral history with Richard Merrill in this series.

² See the oral history with Steve Gliessman in this series.

³ See the oral history with Robbie Jaffe in this series.

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

⁵ See the oral history with Bob Scowcroft in this series.