

# UC Santa Cruz

## Regional History Project Oral Histories

### Title

Heidi Skolnik: Pioneering Apprentice, UCSC Farm and Garden

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5495w3cp>

### Authors

Skolnik, Heidi  
Farmer, Ellen

### Publication Date

2010-05-01

### Supplemental Material

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5495w3cp#supplemental>

# Heidi Skolnik



Heidi Skolnik at the UCSC Farm, circa 1973

## Pioneering Apprentice, UCSC Farm and Garden

*Heidi Skolnik grew up in California and graduated from Santa Cruz High School. At age nineteen, she volunteered at the Chadwick Garden on the UC Santa Cruz campus, working with Alan Chadwick and Steve Kaffka in the very early 1970s. Her memories of the Garden, as well as of the neighborhood buying co-ops, buying clubs, and natural food stores of that time, are detailed, conjuring up the early history of organic foods distribution. When the Student Garden Project expanded to include a farm at the base of campus (on the Great Meadow), Skolnik and a group of students and non-students who called themselves “The Home Farmers” lived in teepees on the Farm. In this oral history, conducted by Ellen Farmer at Skolnik’s home on the San Francisco Peninsula on May 17, 2007, she shares her recollections of these early years of the Farm and the Garden, as well as her time with Santa Cruz Trucking, a wholesale organic food distribution company associated with the natural foods collective Community Foods.*

*Later, Skolnik trained as a health psychologist. She believes there is a*

*strong connection between access to healthy food and the health of individuals and communities, thus connecting her years in the garden and trucking around organic food with her current career.*

#### Additional Resources:

Sites about Alan Chadwick: <http://learningtogive.org/papers/paper188.html>;  
<http://www.ecotopia.org/ehof/chadwick/index.html>.

Randall Jarrell and Irene Reti, eds. *The Early History of the UCSC Farm and Garden* (Regional History Project, University Library, UCSC, 2003). <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/farmgarden>

Alan Chadwick, Stephen J. Crimi (Editor), Foreword by John Jeavons. *Performance in the Garden: A Collection of Talks on Biodynamic French Intensive Horticulture* (Logosophia, 2008).

*The Chadwick Garden Anthology of Poets* (Friends of the UCSC Farm and Garden, 2009). Introduction by Beth Benjamin.

Christina Waters, "Fire in the Garden," *Metro Santa Cruz Newspaper*, Oct. 2-8, 1997, <http://www.metroactive.com/papers/cruz/10.02.97/chadwicks-garden-9740.html>

### Early Background

**Farmer:** This is Thursday, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2007, and I'm with Heidi Skolnik. Heidi lives in Menlo Park, California, now. So could you start by telling me where you were born and where you grew up?

**Skolnik:** I was born in Washington, D.C., but I came out to California when I was six months old, on my daddy's lap, on an airplane. I've lived between Southern and Northern California my whole life. I graduated from Santa Cruz High School, and lived in Santa Cruz for about twenty-one years total. In 1990, I moved down to Irvine, California, to go to graduate school. I moved back up in 1996, to San Francisco, for a postdoctoral fellowship at UC San Francisco. For the last ten years, I've been in either San Francisco, or here in Menlo Park.

**Farmer:** And was your family ever involved in farming?

**Skolnik:** Well [laughs], that's a great question. Not that I know of, although I'm sure if we went far back enough—I have a feeling I'm from peasant stock. Never really got to find out.

**Farmer:** Not in recent history.

**Skolnik:** Not in recent history, yes.

**Farmer:** Okay, and what is your educational background and training?

**Skolnik:** When I left Santa Cruz, I went down to Irvine. I have a Ph.D. in health psychology. I got my bachelor's degree from UC Santa Cruz. Presently, I am not doing work related to sustainable agriculture, but my involvement with it shaped my values and lives on inside of me!

### Coming to the Chadwick Farm and Garden Project

**Farmer:** So what got you interested in sustainable agriculture?

**Skolnik:** I wish I could remember how I heard about Alan Chadwick's garden. I think it was through my sister, who's a little older than me. I had always loved gardening. Gardening was a thread through a hard childhood, a hard home life. Gardening was where I went to be who I am. So I had a big love of gardening. I heard about the [Chadwick] Garden. It was an utterly magical place to me. It was beautiful and there were really interesting people there. Right when I started

---

working in the Garden was when the talk was happening about this larger plot of land on the lower campus that was to become a farm.

So as far as, was I into sustainable agriculture? I don't think we talked about it exactly that way. I think for a lot of the people who were involved it was more of a back-to-the-land thing that was in the 1970s, a countercultural movement. That morphed into sustainable agriculture. Not to say that everyone who was doing that kind of agriculture in the 1970s came from that back-to-the-land perspective, but I think that was true for a lot of the people at the UCSC Farm.

**Farmer:** So what years were you in school?

**Skolnik:** I was at the Farm project before college.

**Farmer:** Oh, I see. So how old were you then?

**Skolnik:** Nineteen.

**Farmer:** And was Alan Chadwick still there at that time?

**Skolnik:** He was. I worked in his presence a couple of days, literally, in the Garden, because there was a core group of gardeners, but you could also come and just work for the day. I remember him very vividly. You don't meet a person like Alan that many times in life. Since I was such a newcomer at that time, here's where I can't really fill in the details, but I remember that there were meetings and word was out that there was this seventeen-acre plot in these meadows down below. I have some vague memories about some meetings about how that was going to come together.

I think what happened was that I went to the Garden, I got really excited about it, and then there was a break in there for me. Then when some of the people had moved down to the Farm, I started going back up again.

**Farmer:** And did you tell me at one point [in the pre-interview meeting] that you remember ground breaking?

**Skolnik:** What I was referring to was taking the English spade—the Chadwick tool of tools, the garden spade—and turfing—ripping off the sod, the cover, the native and non-native cover of those hillsides. Those first beds, those beds that are still there, the garden beds, those were all turfed and dug by hand, with spades. There were no tractors while we were there.

How did I come [to the Chadwick Garden]? I think I was just really young and looking for a place with kindred spirits, and a place where I could work with plants. That was so much my love. It was by definition a political thing, but I think personally I did not have that larger view at the time.

**Farmer:** So for you it was more associations with people and plants and being outdoors, it sounds like.

**Skolnik:** It was the activity, definitely. It was the daily physical work, growing plants, beauty, food, seeing directly the results of your efforts, and a keen sense of working together that shaped me for life.

**Farmer:** So it sounds like you did that, and didn't go to college right away out of high school.

Skolnik: Right.

**Farmer:** Did you also have jobs somewhere, or did you not have to at that time?

**Skolnik:** (laughs) Isn't that amazing? Boy, for a little while it was almost like a moneyless economy for some of us. Where did I have money from? A bit from a job I held in town before being at the Farm full time. Somehow there was funding. There were shared houses, or there was a summer that we lived in the tents, so had no rent. We grew all the food. I had no debt, no credit cards. (laughs) I think I had no expenses.

Farmer: Wow.

**Skolnik:** I don't remember ever needing health care. Some people did. It's amazing now to look back and realize how little of a safety net we had. There were some connections for health care. One of my friend's dad's was a doctor. I remember when someone got hurt, we'd go over to his house.

**Farmer:** So there was a shared house off campus.

**Skolnik:** There were a couple of them over the course of those two years I was involved. I do not know how the rent was paid, but I hope you have another source to document the financial support that was provided in those early days. For sure it was easier then. Large houses in Santa Cruz could be rented for a few hundred dollars per month.

**Farmer:** So how much of the space did you put into production that first year?

**Skolnik:** That's a good question. So all of those raised beds that are four feet by fifty feet long—I don't know what they're called now—is it called the market garden? It looks to me when I go there now [like] pretty much the same amount of space. We had a contoured area of gooseberries below the market garden that's long gone. There was also a strawberry patch at the southern end of the market garden. (Lesson learned from that: don't mulch with straw that is loaded with weed seeds.) We gathered the stone from the nearby quarry to border the herbaceous border and planted it shortly after the main garden area was complete. We built the cold frames and the lath house in the propagation area, and had a pretty large set of beds in the nursery area (which is where I spent most of my time). And we planted the cypress trees that are on the perimeter—you know, those thirty-year-old, gorgeous cypress. The orchard was planted I think right when the apprentice program started. We also planted a subtropical orchard. You know how you walk into the main gate to the Farm?

**Farmer:** Mm-hm.

**Skolnik:** And you start going up that gentle incline to the top.

Farmer: Yes.

**Skolnik:** Over to the right, we planted a subtropical garden. And then 1971 or '72 was one of the coldest Santa Cruz winters in history. We had wonderful things like pineapple guavas and cherimoyas, and everything died. You know, in some ways the Farm now is completely recognizable, and in some ways I realize



---

how much time has passed. I mean, when you look at the size of the trees, of course, you really know how much time has passed. That's a great measure.

**Farmer:** Were you feeding anybody else, or just yourselves, during the two years 1971-1973?

**Skolnik:** I'm almost positive that we sold stuff to what was then the Consumers Co-op in downtown Santa Cruz, on a sporadic basis when we had enough of something. We started the farm stand at the foot of campus (under the buckeye trees) by loading up a large wooden cart and wheeling down the crops. We also sold lettuce to the food service on campus, Saga Foods, for the dining halls. It was figured that eventually they would use more food items from the Farm Project, and lettuce for salads was the start.

**Farmer:** That's come full circle, because now they [are doing that again]. The [campus] food service contracts with the Farm for some foods.<sup>1</sup>

**Skolnik:** That's wonderful. We also used to go up to Saga and get their vegetable trimmings and compost them. I wonder if they still do that.

**Farmer:** That's another full-circle thing. Not for a long time, but now they have done that again.

**Skolnik:** Isn't that cool?

**Farmer:** Yes, yes.

**Skolnik:** Because that was really dedication, going around to the dining halls and picking up their garbage. We had a Captain Compost.

I also have a very fond memory about flowers. The Chadwick garden up on the hill used to put out flowers in the morning, free flowers. Oh, my God!

**Farmer:** Just for people going by?

**Skolnik:** Yes. Across the street there was a little bus shelter, and every morning early, the garden workers would pick these incredible flowers and put them in these one-pound coffee cans with water, and go bring them across the street, and people would come get flowers.

**Farmer:** Oh, how nice.

Was there just one co-op [in town] at that time?

**Skolnik:** Well, there was a store called the Consumers Co-op, which later became Community Foods, which lasted to the late 1980s. There were also neighborhood-oriented buying groups—I guess they were called co-ops—where people would get together and there would be a list of things, and you'd order from a wholesaler who would deliver to someone's garage, and members of the co-op would take turns splitting up the orders.

**Farmer:** To keep the cost of food down.

**Skolnik:** Yes, buy directly from wholesalers. The neighborhood co-ops/buying clubs were not one of our outlets. But even in the early 1970s there were other

---

natural food stores in town. Integral Yoga Institute had a natural food store on Pacific Avenue. Staff of Life existed. Staff of Life started in the early seventies. So we might have sold to them, I don't know.

**Farmer:** And the flowers—did you try to sell them or was it mostly giving away?

**Skolnik:** They were being given away. I think things like plant sales and all that kind of stuff came later. This was the beginning, the establishing. This was laying out the propagation bed, building the lath house, digging the beds, planting the trees. I didn't really have any formal training in gardening before that, or propagating. I learned a lot. Steve Kaffka<sup>2</sup> was a big source of information. And I think we really taught each other.

**Farmer:** Working side-by-side like that?

**Skolnik:** Right. There were books around, and we would talk about stuff at meetings and meals.

**Farmer:** That was a slow pace.

**Skolnik:** We worked really hard—really, really hard. And yet, I guess I *would* call it a slow pace, yes. There was time to sit and talk.

## The Teepees

**Farmer:** What do you remember about the teepees?

**Skolnik:** I remember that we sewed them. I borrowed some sewing machines. I remember that. I remember that the poles were cut down. I remember being part

of one of those parties in the woods, and I remember using drawing knives to scrape the bark from the poles. It was kind of a primordial, amazing thing, to pitch those teepees. I remember learning a lot. You have to put the poles together in a certain way; there's the flaps. It's not something that is just automatic. There was some stuff we had to learn about them. Some of them leaked. Some of them didn't. There're ways to keep them from leaking and so on. Then we lived in them for a summer. I have a very visceral memory of that. I can completely remember walking through the canvas door and getting inside that circular space. I shared a teepee with two other women, and I remember exactly where my spot was. Do you know where they were? They were up on the—

**Farmer:** I remember seeing them, yes.

**Skolnik:** Well, later on they were in different places.

**Farmer:** Oh, so where were the first ones?

**Skolnik:** Because I think this place was a little too visible. (chuckles) Later on, they had to put them along the perimeter of the Farm. But that first time, they were out on this outcropping across— You went out the far gate, over by the [old] slaughterhouse [from the historic Cowell Ranch]—you know there's that gate to the Farm?

**Farmer:** Mm-hm.

**Skolnik:** You go across the bicycle path, and there's a granite rise right there, and it was on top of there. The teepees were on top of there.

**Farmer:** With an ocean view.

**Skolnik:** Yes, no doubt. [Both chuckle.] When it wasn't foggy.

### That Expansive Time

**Farmer:** Yes. So what were you saying about this being an incredible time in your life?

**Skolnik:** Well, I know in terms of meeting with you, and when I went recently to a book club group about *The Omnivore's Dilemma*<sup>3</sup>, I feel now, still, almost an umbilical cord—a strong connection to the values and aspirations [of that] really expansive time. We had fun together, too, an incredible amount. You know, just bonds that, even though I don't see these people anymore— I mean, the idea now that you'd spend a year and a half knowing someone and remember them for the rest of your life sounds a little crazy, but that's how it was. It was a formative time. It shaped me. When I read an e-mail from Barry Adler [to the CASFS Back 40 Reunion]: he's doing it!<sup>4</sup> There are other people who are doing it. And I'm not. But if I got together with any of those people, we would have tons to talk about. If I can say this without getting weepy: I have never, never enjoyed anything since as much as I enjoyed that. Some people would say, "Oh, it was because you were nineteen and twenty years old." I don't think so. I think it's possible to have that kind of love for what you're doing at any age of your life, but there's no question that I sure had it then. And to a certain extent, when I think about how I want to feel in my life and how I want to feel about my work, I have that as a comparison. I'm grateful for that. I feel really lucky for that. And at Community Foods I thought that way. I think it's all kind of connected. That

feeling of: there is no disconnect between your life and your work, and all of it is totally an expression of exactly what you want to be doing. That's how it felt. But then I didn't have anything to compare it to, so I probably didn't realize how different it can be than that. It was unity.

**Farmer:** How many people do you think were there at that time?

**Skolnik:** This is the group of people who called themselves "the home farmers," yes? It was before the apprenticeship program officially started. There was a core group, I'd say, and then there were people who came and went. The core group was between eighteen and twenty people. Sometimes it fluctuated. I know there were a lot more during the summer. But people came from all over. Now I'm this social scientist, and if I was doing this now, I'd go around and ask everybody, "How did you get here?" and "How did you hear about it?" (laughs) But we didn't do that then. I was vaguely aware that a lot of the people had a lot of options and chose this. I guess I kind of put myself in that group, but I felt a little bit more that way about some other people. There was someone who just graduated from Stanford with a bachelor's degree in economics, and there were people [like] Steve Kaffka who— I think a fair amount already had college degrees, and came from pretty middle-class backgrounds, and were choosing this. I think that was one of the amazing things about it. There were a really crazy variety of people. It would be great to know about every single one of them.

---

## Community Foods

**Farmer:** Well, why don't you tell me the story of Community Foods, like how it got started?

**Skolnik:** Well, I wasn't there at the inception, so I can't tell you that. I hope somebody is doing an oral history of some of those people who were there at the beginning. I don't know how to find them. But it was a cooperative, a food co-op, which is [part of] that big, grassroots movement. I guess it must have started in the late sixties. When I first remember it, it was [in] a storefront at the end of North Pacific [Avenue]. There used to be a mobile home park at the end of North Pacific. I don't know if it's still there.

**Farmer:** There's a little one there.

**Skolnik:** Yes? It's there still?

Farmer: Yes.

**Skolnik:** That's crazy! And you'd walk in. The front room was just a cement floor. It was a plain, basic place with bins of bulk foods, and then cheese was cut behind the counter, and a little produce room in the back—really funky, bleak, dark, not much good lighting, no windows, very much the kind of place where you would shop only if you were already kind of countercultural, you know? There was this nonprofit at the university called USA, United Services Agency, an umbrella organization for nonprofits in Santa Cruz. And one of the nonprofits that went under this umbrella was Community Foods. The Whole Earth

Restaurant [at UCSC]. The late, great Whole Earth. They were another one under United Services Agency. Maybe Community Printers, the print shop collective. I was really not very much in on it becoming a state of California nonprofit, filing for nonprofit status, and all those kinds of things that Community Foods eventually did. I wasn't really a leader of any of that. I was busy driving trucks and working with produce.

### Santa Cruz Trucking

**Farmer:** Well, tell me about that.

**Skolnik:** I was involved in the wholesale end of Community Foods, which was called Santa Cruz Trucking.<sup>5</sup> Now, in hindsight, it was relatively small scale, what we were doing, but at that time, everything was pretty small compared to now. At the retail end [Community Foods], a huge day was when we hit \$6000 in sales. Whole Foods near me probably does that in one hour now.

We were a key player in the greater San Francisco-Monterey Bay area [in] wholesaling organic produce. It started out as just a truck that Community Foods owned to go to the produce markets and get produce. Then we realized we could do that for other stores as well. There was this burgeoning food network in the San Francisco Bay Area. One of the organizations is still around, Veritable Vegetable.<sup>6</sup> And there was the San Francisco Cooperative Warehouse, SFCW. There was Red Star Cheese. All the different types of food were being marketed by worker-owned, worker-operated worker collectives with political ideals. We became part of that network. I started working at Community Foods, I think, in



1975, and I became involved in the wholesaling about a couple of years later. I did it until 1984.

**Farmer:** So you grew it into something?

**Skolnik:** Yes, very much so. I think we were probably the main supplier of organic produce for all the natural food stores in Santa Cruz, which at that time there were many. In Santa Cruz County there were probably eight or ten independent natural foods stores.

**Farmer:** And how did that work? How did you get your orders and get your vegetables?

**Skolnik:** It was—ah! Crazy! There were no computers. (laughs) But we had really strong personal relationships with the produce buyers at each of the stores, and we called them on order days. Twice a week we had truck runs, and we would go up to San Francisco. We would go to Veritable. We'd pick up a lot of produce there because they were the big San Francisco warehouse. We go to the farmers' market at Alemany, pick up produce there. And we dealt directly with some growers. Then we'd come back down here and deliver it to the stores. Very low tech.

**Farmer:** But you had to keep track of everything.

**Skolnik:** Right: we wrote our invoices by hand, and inventorying was kind of seat of the pants. I feel, frankly, like both the UCSC farm and Community Foods were learn-as-you-go kind of things. I think it's maybe a little less possible to do

that now, at least in California, because of the economic realities. But believe it or not, it was possible then for a group of twenty-year-olds to learn how to run a wholesale produce business. We were doing a million dollars' worth of business a year. It seemed like a huge amount. It's small potatoes now, but it was huge.

### More on Community Foods

It was a big deal. There's a lot of history about Community Foods that I could recount, depending on what you want to know.

**Farmer:** Go for it. Yes, whatever is important to you.

**Skolnik:** The wholesale part started only to support that store, so when the people who were really into produce or wholesaling, such as me, started to diversify, there was some conflict about giving other stores the same prices. I remember there was definitely some tension around that. The relationships between the wholesale and the retail business were always having to be negotiated, and were always a source of some weirdness. But it really had its glory time. There were some years when it was absolutely, hands-down, the best thing going in Santa Cruz for food.

It was run by the people who worked there. I think we called ourselves owners, but we didn't have any financial interest, because it was owned by the nonprofit organization. But we had regular meetings. Again, probably a group of about twenty people. The wage I remember was six dollars an hour, and that would have been around 1980. We decided everything by consensus. That was a big word. It was sometimes really difficult, because we didn't have the management

---

foresight to figure out that there should be consensus about big issues, but not necessarily about what kind of peanut butter to stock on the shelf.

**Farmer:** Oh. [Chuckles.]

**Skolnik:** So meetings were sometimes kind of absurd, looking back, because everything had to be decided by the group. Also another thing I remember is that—I'll stop being negative soon, but—I remember that there was this idea that people weren't allowed to specialize in produce, and I really wanted to specialize in produce. Produce was my love, love, love. And people were saying that that was *bad*, that everyone had to take turns doing *everything*! That was an ethic of those times: Everyone should be paid the same, and everyone should do the same work. [Chuckles.] When I paste on my sensibilities from now, I think that that was part of the demise of the business, because they didn't allow people to specialize in marketing and really they weren't able to change with the times. They didn't develop the kind of expertise that it took to conquer the changing context for natural food stores.

But it was a wonderful place to work. It's kind of like what I said about the home farmers—if you named any one of those people, I would instantly remember what their voice sounds like, their habits, their gestures. It was imprinted on me, and I'm sure it's true for others, too. I have vivid memories of carrot tosses, tossing carrot bags off the truck, tossing watermelons off the truck, just loving the physical work. Loving the fresh food.

**Farmer:** And somebody would catch the watermelons?

Skolnik: Yes.

**Farmer:** (laughs)

**Skolnik:** Once in a great while, one would drop, but it was really unusual. There was no division between work and life. Physical exuberance, joking with each other, celebrating birthdays and other important events, believing in having a mission and believing in what we were doing. And probably sometimes carrying that to the point where the organization didn't evolve enough. That's what I think now. That's what I thought when I left, actually, in the mid-1980s. I think the common thread for me personally is the sensuality, the beauty, absolute total beauty of food, of produce. I know that that started at the Farm. It would have to.

### **More Reflections on the Early UCSC Farm**

Going back to the Farm, one thing I'd definitely like to say is that the vegetables and flowers that were grown there were *so* beautiful, and they are now, when I go to that farm stand on the days that it's open. But for us, all of that was discovery. I didn't know what a rhubarb plant looked like until we grew rhubarb. I didn't know all those leaf lettuces, and we planted them in the colorful rows like they're doing now for the salad mixes. Everything up there; everything was a discovery. Everything was new. Everything we were doing we had not done before. I think that went for everyone there. I don't think there was anyone at the UCSC Farm who came from a farming family. There were people who were into building. There were people into alternative energy, like Barry Adler was. Everyone was just discovering that stuff. It was extremely cutting edge.

**Farmer:** He [Barry Adler] said something in an e-mail [he sent to people coming to the Back Forty CASFS reunion] about the oil crisis [of the mid-seventies] that was happening. And that stimulated solutions.

Skolnik: Right.

**Farmer:** And the first Earth Day was happening, and things like that.<sup>7</sup>

**Skolnik:** What an amazing time! It really was.

**Farmer:** So Alan Chadwick. He had high standards, right?

**Skolnik:** Yes. Alan Chadwick was famous for making people cry because he would say such mean things, and it even happened to me, even though I was only working with him a couple of times. I was washing carrots, and I wasn't washing carrots the right way, and he was very, very harsh. He could be a harsh man. Of course, he had that wonderful theatrical, British voice, which I can instantly hear in my head right now. (laughs) It's been thirty-five years at least. But he was incredibly charismatic and really of that place. He and that place were so unified. But I thought that people were very scared of him. Some people. Maybe women were more scared than men. I don't know. Not because he was weird towards women, but his closest gardeners did happen to be male. But I think there were pretty equal amounts of women and men there.<sup>8</sup>

You wanted to talk about the whole gender thing. I was thinking a little bit about that on the way home tonight. I was thinking that my experiences at the Farm and Garden and at Community Foods really were that people were not expected

---

to take on any particular role because of their gender or sex. So that, of course, was a totally formative experience for me. I feel fortunate in that way.

**Farmer:** So you could be as empowered as you wanted.

**Skolnik:** Yes. And people were, definitely. I mean, the fact that I didn't play a role in the business side, for example, of Community Foods was totally my own choosing. It wasn't that "the men did that."

**Farmer:** Yes. You just wanted to do the vegetables. But the Alan Chadwick influence—I'm wondering about the aesthetics of vegetables and flowers.

**Skolnik:** Oh, my goodness, yes. Has anyone talked about how to trim a leek?

**Farmer:** No. How do you do that?

**Skolnik:** (laughs) Well, you know, the leek, of course, was one of his signature vegetables. When I think of Alan Chadwick, I think of leeks. And also, just to reminisce a little bit, I'm remembering there were definitely leeks and carrots. And there was a beautiful patch of lilies that he adored, under the trees in the garden. The way to trim a leek. (laughs) I don't have a leek to demonstrate on, but you create this beautiful, tapered greenery so that it goes kind of like in a V-shape. A lot of the green is left on. You're absolutely right. He was all about the aesthetics of gardening, the divine (not too strong a word in this context) nature of plants. That was magical.

You know, this conversation is making me realize how much I got from that experience. Even though he wasn't at the Farm, the people who were the leaders

---

of the Farm had been trained by him, so that aesthetic completely permeated the place in every kind of way. That's huge.

**Farmer:** It is. Because when you talk about magic, I think there's something about the region and the location of that particular farm with the way you could look around, and it was so open and—

**Skolnik:** Yes. Oh, yes.

**Farmer:** What do you think about the weather challenges, or the climate for growing?

**Skolnik:** Well, as soon as I hear you say that, I place myself up on that rise that is the Farm, where you're overlooking the Monterey Bay area. I remember the moist air. I remember seeing the fog over the bay. It would come and go, unlike San Francisco, where it just stays so much more. The fog usually burned off in the afternoon at the Farm. You could predict it. I wonder how many of the apprentices and the early home farmers would say this, but that land is imprinted on me. It is my favorite landscape, those rolling grassland meadows that go up and up and then become the oak woodlands. The westside Santa Cruz highlands are my favorite landscape, and I know it's from being there. I was at Wilder Ranch a couple of weekends ago, and I thought: this is my roots. And it's not that I was born there, but it was that I was on the Farm project there.

**Farmer:** That's where you got your sense of place.

**Skolnik:** Yes, exactly, very much so. I wonder how many other people would say that. It would be interesting to know.

### Other Organic Farmers in the Central Coast Region

**Farmer:** Yes, it's spectacular. You must have seen a lot of other farms, though, if you were doing wholesaling.

**Skolnik:** Later on, in Community Foods?

**Farmer:** Around the region.

**Skolnik:** We worked mostly with the other wholesalers, the distribution network, like Veritable. We went to a few small farms. I remember Russel Wolter's<sup>9</sup> place down in Carmel Valley. I think mostly we dealt with other wholesalers, though, or people came to us.

**Farmer:** They delivered.

**Skolnik:** Yes. One of my favorite parts of the job at both Community Foods and at Santa Cruz Trucking was Apple Bob [Bob Gilardoni]. Apple Bob would come and bring us his apples. And the guy up Old San Jose Road who had lemons or French plums. The persimmons from Old San Jose Road—all these people whose land had been in their families, who were from different ethnic enclaves of old Santa Cruz. I knew even then, I think, in my naiveté, that it was a dying breed.

**Farmer:** The trees were old.



**Skolnik:** The trees were old, and some of those places are now subdivisions, I'm sure. But that was a delight to me. Some of those places are definitely still around. But, yes, we would get a lot of produce brought to us as well. The scale of everything was smaller. Maybe that's beside the point, but I think the scale, in a way, is somewhere in this story. It was small scale, and some of the things we did wouldn't have worked on a larger scale. And vice versa. Did you say you had talked to Melody [Meyer] about the current scale issues and supply issues?<sup>10</sup>

**Farmer:** Yes. Just about—if you've got a demand for apples and it's not apple season, you bring them in from New Zealand or somewhere.

### Purists

**Skolnik:** That's right. I think that's another thing I would say about both my experiences at the Farm and at Community Foods. A word I would totally use to describe us is that we were purists. (laughs) Does that resonate? Oh, my God! We were such purists. Oh!

**Farmer:** This is before there were any official rules, right, in the organic world?

**Skolnik:** Exactly, although at Community Foods, I was involved [in] some of those early efforts. I remember going up to Sacramento and working on the original California [organic certification], because California took the lead in that. And another thing I spearheaded at Community Foods was that we had these stickers that denoted whether something was organically grown, or conventionally grown, or in transition. I remember how hard it was to keep that

up. Some of the issues are the same now as they were then. The correct labeling of food. I remember caring about that so much.

There was no way that we would carry something that wasn't in season. It was just out of the question. I mean, the infrastructure wasn't there to a large extent. The Southern Hemisphere wasn't supplying the U.S. with food at that time. It just wasn't. But still, if it had been, we wouldn't have. [Laughter.] In February we did not have lettuce, because there was no organic lettuce for a month or more. We carried papayas and mangos; we carried Mexican bananas, I remember. But, still, it was in season. We were purists in a lot of ways. People had to bring their own containers and bags to the retail store.

**Farmer:** Oh, yes. That's where I learned how to grind peanut butter.

**Skolnik:** Yes. And there was a range. Everyone probably had a strong feeling about something, but it varied. One person could feel strongly about not carrying sugar, for example. There was no sugar in the store. [Chuckles.]

**Farmer:** Oh. You had to cook with honey?

**Skolnik:** It was honey or molasses. Oh, maple syrup. Maple syrup was there. And nothing with white flour, absolutely. There were no frozen foods back then that were natural foods. Apparently there still aren't, according to Michael Pollan. [Both chuckle.] But, yes, boy, purists, definitely.

**Farmer:** That's why Polar Bear [ice cream] was so popular.

**Skolnik:** [Whispers]: That's right. Polar Bear ice cream?

**Skolnik:** That's right. Are they still in business?

Farmer: No.

**Skolnik:** [Intake of breath.]

**Farmer:** They still make the ice cream. They supply it to other people.

**Skolnik:** Oh. Polar Bear ice cream. Boy, I hadn't thought about that in a while. Staff of Life, too. I think the same guy owns it who did thirty years ago.

**Farmer:** Oh, yes, Richard [Josephson].

**Skolnik:** I think he still owns it.

**Farmer:** He dresses in a very colorful way.

### The Organic Movement

**Skolnik:** Wonderful guy. That business is slightly different because it was a privately owned, profit-oriented business, but they had some of the same passion and commitment to the movement, if you will. It was a movement. And it still is. I don't think it's a movement for Whole Foods. It's not the same kind of thing. They're cashing in on it. There's that quote, I think it's in Michael Pollan's book, in *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, where a bunch of small farmers and larger farmers—there's a big old meeting. And one of those large growers says to the small grower, "What you need is a niche." And the guy says, "I have one. It's called organic growing, and *you* took it over, or you co-opted it," or whatever he said.

Another thing that pops into my head about Community Foods is that—it seems weird for now—but we didn't have a financial stake in the business. I think there was a plus and a minus there.

### Worker's Collective

**Farmer:** So the idea of it being a collective, did you call it?

**Skolnik:** Yes, that's what we always called it, a worker collective. Then later on, after I left, it changed its structure, and people did become owners. They bought in. But then the business died. It didn't last very long at all under that structure.

**Farmer:** What about the space? Do you know why you ended up in Live Oak?

**Skolnik:** I definitely remember the woman who owned the building and going to see her and signing the lease. In fact, I ran into her a couple of summers ago, after, let's see, twenty-five-plus years. She walked up to me at a concert and said, "Heidi??"

**Farmer:** [Chuckles.]

**Skolnik:** I don't remember her name, but she took a fondness to all these kids. I'm sure she gave us a very good deal on the space. The second location after North Pacific was on Seabright [Avenue], on the end of Seabright. I think mid-Santa Cruz was just where we were heading, yes.

**Farmer:** Which end of Seabright?

**Skolnik:** It was where—now there's a pub or outdoor restaurant on that corner of that street.

**Farmer:** Oh, so down by the railroad tracks.

**Skolnik:** Yes, right by the railroad tracks. There was an open lot where Seabright Brewery is, and we were next to it, inland from there, probably for at least a year, not very long. And that's where Staff of Life started. Staff of Life was there before us, believe it or not. That goes way back. Yes, I think probably there was an intention to be in the middle of the town. And it had a place for Way of Life, you know, the [natural supplements and cosmetics] business that was behind Community Foods?

**Farmer:** Oh, yes. Which is still going.

**Skolnik:** Yes, over on 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue now. That was an intention, to be together.

**Farmer:** Had you seen that at other places, or do you think you invented that pairing of personal care with food?

### United Services Agency

**Skolnik:** Way of Life was part of USA. I'm quite sure they were under that same umbrella. It was a good pairing. Now it's kind of paired too, at New Leaf [Market], because they're next door to New Leaf. In hindsight, it seems to me that everything was done in a seat-of-the-pants approach, but it probably wasn't the case. There was probably more planning, and I just wasn't in on it.

---

**Farmer:** Was everybody about the same age?

**Skolnik:** There was probably a range.

**Farmer:** But there were no parent figures, or grown-up figures.

**Skolnik:** No, we didn't think we were too young to be doing it. Of course not.

**Farmer:** And were people living in collective households and so forth?

**Skolnik:** You mean the people who worked at Community Foods?

Farmer: Yes.

**Skolnik:** If there were roommates, that was just a coincidence.

**Farmer:** What was it like to try and get healthy food to people on a reliable basis every single day at Community Foods?

**Skolnik:** I guess we *did* know what we were doing, because we did do that every day. But we weren't on our own. There was an established network of wholesalers and retailers. It wasn't like we were pioneers. I wouldn't quite use that word. We had models to work with. The people who were there five years before me maybe were pioneers. It wasn't that far in the past. There were wholesalers we got deliveries from. We unloaded trucks. We did a lot of physical work. We stocked all day long. We ate lunch together. We ran the register. People had shifts that were scheduled. You worked either the morning shift or the afternoon shift, and you worked several shifts a week. No one worked full

time. And you cleaned, you mopped at the end of the day. You know, it was just every part of it.

**Farmer:** Was it open in the evening?

**Skolnik:** No, it closed around six.

**Farmer:** Because then you had to have time for those meetings.

**Skolnik:** That's right.

**Farmer:** [Chuckles.]

**Skolnik:** Exactly. I was trying to remember how often we had meetings. I think we may have only had them once a month, but I'm not sure. It was really a community of people working. That was a nice feeling that people have now, too, I think, in plenty of places. For me, it was combined with a lot of hard physical work. I worked really hard. We bought this truck after using rentals for a while. It was a twenty-two-foot bobtail, a refrigerated bobtail truck, a ten speed, and I pretty much taught myself how to drive it, with some help. And whoever was driving, whoever was doing those truck runs (Kenny [Ken Kimes] was one of my partners in that crime), we loaded and unloaded that truck by hand. There were no forklifts, no pallet jacks, nothing. Those all came later.

**Farmer:** Whew!

---

**Skolnik:** So there was a lot of wonderful physical work. That's a big part of my memory of all of those places, is hard physical work that never—never, ever, ever felt like a chore. The pleasure in the work was always there.

**Farmer:** Like a rhythm.

**Skolnik:** Yes, yes.

**Farmer:** Yes. So why did you leave, then?

**Skolnik:** (laughs) Why did I leave Community Foods and Santa Cruz Trucking?

**Farmer:** Mm-hm.

**Skolnik:** So that would be in 1984. I'd been there for nine years, which was a *really* long time, eight or nine years. It was time for a change for me. It became apparent in a lot of ways. I think when I left, I probably didn't realize I would never go back to that arena, because then I got this idea in my head to go back to school, and I went to UC Santa Cruz from '86 to '88. I do feel a kinship with everyone who's involved in that kind of stuff, and sometimes I have regrets, but those are pretty useless to dwell on.

**Farmer:** Yes. The world shifts.

**Skolnik:** Right, and we shift with it.



---

## The Sustainable Agriculture Movement

**Farmer:** Yes. So what would you say were your greatest rewards and your greatest challenges in your relationship to sustainable agriculture in general? Whatever way you want to think about it.

**Skolnik:** Well, I feel incredibly blessed to have been active in something that I so loved and so believed in, and that is what I would wish for everyone. I was really fired up about it, and a lot of people were. There were probably some without the same level of commitment, but for many of us, it was our passion. There was that shared mission, shared passion. So it was its own reward, in a sense. I loved meeting farmers. There is nothing that has taken the place of that, because there's *no one* like a small farmer. Hands down, they're the poets of the land. They love what they're doing. They love the food. They appreciate the beauty, the aesthetic of what they're doing. And they're characters. They're great characters. Every one of them is so different. The chance to meet a lot of them, I was really grateful [for].

**Farmer:** I'm wondering which ones do you remember?

**Skolnik:** (laughs) Oh, a lot. I wouldn't want to name any because I'd be leaving some out. Of course I remember Russel [Wolter] especially. And Apple Bob, the guy who used to bring us apples. You know, everyone who brought us those crops. Another person, by the way, who I was thinking of before is Betty Van Dyke, who grows cherries out in Gilroy. And still does. It would be wonderful if you could talk to her.<sup>11</sup>

**Farmer:** She's been around a long time.

**Skolnik:** Oh, yes, and grows the best cherries around. So definitely interview her during cherry season.

**Farmer:** Yes. Well, I did get to talk to Russ and Karen [Wolter], together.

**Skolnik:** Oh! Excellent.

**Farmer:** And you went out visiting when they were farming that land?

### **Heidi's Produce**

**Skolnik:** I used to see them at the farmers' market more than anything. But my connection with Russell is that before I joined up with Santa Cruz Trucking, I had my own produce business called Heidi's Produce. I left that part out. So when I worked at Community Foods, I saw the need for someone to bring Russell's lettuce up to Santa Cruz. That's what I started out doing. Heidi's Produce brought Russel Wolter's lettuce in a Ford Econoline van, dripping all the way. Then I went and got mushrooms in Watsonville, and then I picked up strawberries. I think those were the main things. It's amazing it all fit into the van, and sometimes it didn't. I would go down to Watsonville, get all those things. Russell was distributing through Capurro and Son. I'm sure he mentioned them.

Farmer: Yes.

**Skolnik:** I'd go down to Capurro and pick up Russell's lettuce and his broccoli, which was always a big deal when he had broccoli. (laughs) Organic broccoli was so unusual. It's probably hard to know now, huh? Now it's pretty ubiquitous because Cal Organics is growing broccoli, but to get organic broccoli back then was like, "Oh, we got broccoli today, you guys!" And that's how a lot of those things were. In February and March there was no organic lettuce, so we didn't have lettuce then. We didn't sell it. (laughs)

**Farmer:** It was seasonal.

**Skolnik:** Yes. But anyway, so I did that. I gave that business over to Santa Cruz Trucking when I joined up with Santa Cruz Trucking.

**Farmer:** So where was the location of Heidi's Produce?

**Skolnik:** At my home. And my truck. It was just my truck. Live Oak.

**Farmer:** How did people buy things from you?

**Skolnik:** I delivered to the natural food stores. There were a few stores. Have you heard of the store called Miller's Harvest?

**Farmer:** I think so.

**Skolnik:** There was one called Sunflower Natural Foods even before that. The IYI [Integral Yoga Institute] store was downtown; Staff of Life, Community Foods. I think there were at one point probably about eight, all different.

**Farmer:** And the one up on Mission, that little—

---

**Skolnik:** Yes, Food Bin. It was there.

**Farmer:** Still there.

**Skolnik:** It's been there forever. Started in a gas station. Has that look to it. But I loved going out. I loved doing that. I loved meeting the strawberry growers and the mushroom guys and all that stuff.

**Farmer:** And all those people were small, family farmers at that time, do you think?

**Skolnik:** Yes, the mushroom growers were—I forget the name, but it was a company, but the strawberry—sure, small growers out there. Some of them are probably still there. The strawberry growers. So that was a huge reward, getting to do all of that. I guess the fact that it *was* so rewarding, and that I haven't recaptured that extent of reward in my professional life now, is probably where regret lies. Because I think, hmm, if I had stayed in that, would I be having that feeling now?

**Farmer:** Well, there is definitely a resurgence of locavores and that sort of thing.

**Skolnik:** Yes, isn't that a great word?

Farmer: Yes.

**Skolnik:** And the other word you used—what was the difficulty?

**Farmer:** Challenge.

---

## Reflections

**Skolnik:** Challenge. Well, this is more about Community Foods rather than the Farm. Let me think if there were any challenges at the Farm whatsoever. I have a feeling there probably weren't. [Chuckles.] Isn't that amazing to think about?

**Farmer:** Yes. An idyllic time.

**Skolnik:** I think it kind of was for me, yes. Challenge. It's fun to think about that, so let me think about it for a second.

Farmer: Okay.

**Skolnik:** [Chuckles.] There was a personal challenge, which was, and it's hard for me to believe now, but I think I was a little overly shy. So when I wanted to do stuff like get involved and be a decision maker, I think that was a bit of a struggle. But there was absolutely no challenge in terms of the work or philosophy. I don't remember arguments about how to do things. I'm sure there were some, but it must not have been very important to me. It *was* an idyllic time. There's no question.

## More on Community Foods

Community Foods—there were a lot of challenges. That was not an idyllic time. It was not. It really came to a head when— I remember I was one of the main people—in fact, it might have even been my idea, perish the thought, that people who worked there longer got paid more. And people saw me as a capitalist enemy with that. That is not an exaggeration. It would have been 1981, I'm pretty

sure, and it did not come to pass. Some people really resented me for proposing it.

**Farmer:** Oh, that lingered, that feeling?

**Skolnik:** It seemed to. I was probably over-sensitive to it, too. So there were challenges, because we had different ideas about how to be an alternative business. There was a lot of common ground, but there was a lot of dissent. That's a whole book in itself.

**Farmer:** Disagreements about how to run things.

**Skolnik:** Disagreements? That's a good question. Well, I don't know if it really affected the running of the business [but] there was that conflict I mentioned to you about Santa Cruz Trucking being the wholesaler for the store, first and foremost. I remember getting in trouble with some of the store people when I was more identified with the wholesale business. I remember getting in trouble with them for other reasons as well—for cutting deals, I guess, to other stores, something like that.

**Farmer:** You were supposed to be loyal.

**Skolnik:** Right. I left with some bitterness, actually. I do think it was a business that didn't evolve adequately and that could still exist. There could be a worker-owned natural food store in Santa Cruz. There is in San Francisco. It's called Rainbow Grocery. So it can happen. Rainbow has been in existence that long.<sup>12</sup>

**Farmer:** Since that time?

**Skolnik:** Absolutely. And has really, really evolved and changed. Go there if you're ever in San Francisco. It's an amazing store. It's huge, and the prices are wonderful, and there're workers walking around with piercings and tattoos. They reach out to the Latino community which is in the neighborhood. They're closed on May Day. They're just this wonderful business. Community Foods could have evolved and thrived.

**Farmer:** And I think there's a food co-op in Davis that's been here that whole time.

**Skolnik:** Yes. Those would be wonderful case studies, yes. To see how they've adapted.

**Farmer:** Yes. Now, wasn't Community Foods at some times kind of like a community center? Was there a bulletin board?

**Skolnik:** There was a free box. But I wouldn't call it a community center, by any—

**Farmer:** But kind of a crossroads or something.

**Skolnik:** Oh, absolutely a crossroads. Definitely. In fact, there were years in Santa Cruz where—actually, probably until I moved away, where I couldn't go anywhere without running into someone I knew. They would always say, "Where do I know you from?" And I would say, "Probably Community Foods," and they'd say, yes. For the town of Santa Cruz, it was an integral part of— As I said, it was the best thing going for natural food, hands down, for a long time.

---

Looking back, it doesn't seem like that long. It died prematurely, but it was a long time.

**Farmer:** It was a generation, in a way. How many years?

**Skolnik:** I don't know when the consumers' co-op actually started, but if we say it started in 1968—twenty years, I suppose, give or take—

**Farmer:** Yes. So you were starting to think about sustainable agriculture as a movement, and wanting to say more about that.

### **The Impact of the UCSC Farm on Local Organic Agriculture**

**Skolnik:** Yes. Well, that was one of the main topics, and maybe we haven't talked about it enough. I know you talked on the phone about that part of this project is about making the link between the Farm and the sustainable ag[riculture] movement in Santa Cruz County.

Farmer: Yes.

**Skolnik:** The only way I can talk about it is really that it's more of a Gestalt kind of thing, than people actually went— Because most of the people who I knew from those early days of the Farm left Santa Cruz. And the Pogonip farmers and the Route One farmers<sup>13</sup> and all those people that hopefully are part of this oral history, I don't think they were involved in the UCSC farm, although I have a feeling maybe one or two of them were, in their early days.



**Farmer:** Were they cross-pollinating, though? People who worked at the Farm then went and worked with them, and things like that?

**Skolnik:** A lot of that, right. Actually now you reminded me of some exceptions to that. There's a guy named Dennis Tamura.<sup>14</sup> He has Blue Heron Farm now. He was up at the UCSC Farm, so that's an exception. I'm wrong already.

**Farmer:** Well, there're a bunch of them.

**Skolnik:** Tim Vos. Tim Vos was at the UCSC farm, and then he was at Blue Heron [Farm], and now I think he's on the board for the farmers' market. So there are those connections, definitely. I think it would be great to discover more of those cross-pollinations. Those are a couple that I know of.

**Farmer:** Could you say a little bit more about going to Sacramento and working on the political issues?

**Skolnik:** Has the name Tony Scheer come up at all?

**Farmer:** Yes, somebody [mentioned him]. It may have been Ken Kimes.

**Skolnik:** Tony Scheer, Russel Wolter and I—and maybe one other person—driving up there. That was when the California health and safety code was being developed, to have a definition of “organic.” I think that would have been about 1981 or 1982? It was a hearing. I don't remember the details.

**Farmer:** Was it because people were cheating, or saying it was organic when it wasn't organic?

**Skolnik:** Oh, sure. That was a huge part of it, absolutely. It was very easy. I think it's still very easy, actually. But that would be more of a question for people who are involved in it now.

**Farmer:** Yes. There's the organic police now.

**Skolnik:** Right, there's organic police. But what hasn't changed is that the buck really stops with the retailer. The people who were involved in the produce end of natural foods back in the 1970s (maybe I'm biased because this was my interest) but a lot of us knew who grew something, or maybe we knew them, or we knew what it means to be in transition to organic. We knew what they do to bananas to make them ripen, or what they do to potatoes to make them not sprout. There're a lot of people working natural foods produce [in large chains now] that don't know those things. The responsibility for organic labeling of producers is at the retailers' end, and I don't think it's really being kept up by the chains. I don't believe it is.

I don't remember much about that Sacramento trip, but it was one small step in the California health and safety code, which has now been superceded by federal—I don't know how that works. California still might have a stronger—

**Farmer:** Yes, there're layers of regulation that they have to comply with. Some of the farmers I've talked to are overwhelmed with regulation now.

**Skolnik:** Right. There's an interesting thing in *The Omnivore's Dilemma* about a grower who's decided not to even go for certification as organic, and I can understand that perspective.

[Also] I think that what's going on now is that there's this groundswelling of interest among consumers for natural and organic food, [but] consumers aren't really educating themselves. For example, I was at the farmers' market in Menlo Park this weekend, which is not an organic market. There are some markets that are fully organic and only people who sell there are organic. I think some people just assume when they go to a farmers' market that everything grown there is organic. I think that's a lack of inquiry, really, on the part of consumers. Wholesalers know that consumers are kind of lazy, and they take advantage of it. It's not a gloomy situation, but that is part of the picture right now.

**Farmer:** There was some conversation in one of these interviews about certified farmers' markets confusing people because—

**Skolnik:** Right, the word "certified."

Farmer: Yes.

**Skolnik:** Exactly. I think that's exactly what happens. That's what I thought on Sunday when I was at Menlo. It's certified, but it's not certified organic.

**Farmer:** So somebody could rearrange that, but that was the funny way the laws came together. It had that implication.

Skolnik: Yes.

**Farmer:** I think I've been talking to some of the people that got those laws in place [laughs], so it's kind of interesting.

---

**Skolnik:** Which ones?

**Farmer:** Jerry Thomas was really involved.<sup>15</sup>

**Skolnik:** The certified organic laws or—

**Farmer:** Well, a little of both, but he was involved with the certified farmers' markets certifying that the people who grew—

**Skolnik:** The people who are selling the food grew the food. That's a big deal in itself. I think it's a wonderful thing.

**Farmer:** So when you had your own vegetable business, did you guarantee that things were organic?

**Skolnik:** Not all of it. The strawberries weren't. The mushrooms weren't. But, I sure knew. I went to where they were grown. You know, there were no organic strawberries then. There just weren't. It was a really big deal when Swanton Berry Farm started growing berries organically. That was in the early eighties, I think.<sup>16</sup> I remember very clearly that people said that you could not grow strawberries organically before then, and he proved that you could.

**Farmer:** What kind of people would say that you couldn't?

**Skolnik:** I don't know, but that was just word on the street, so to speak.

**Farmer:** What I'm wondering about is official advice from government.

**Skolnik:** Like co-op extensions and things like that?

Farmer: Yes.

**Skolnik:** Yes, I wonder, too. I don't know. I'm pretty sure there weren't any organic mushrooms, either. (laughs) But then when there was something with as much demand and as local as strawberries or mushrooms and we couldn't get organic, I was fully behind getting the best possible quality of the conventionally grown ones. And that's why it was so wonderful to go right out to the field and talk to the person who was growing the strawberries.

**Farmer:** Yes. So what are you doing now?

**Skolnik:** I'm in something totally different. I'm doing evaluation at the UCSF Medical Center. I'm doing evaluation research. I'm trained as a health psychologist, and I see these connections, and I want to try to manifest it in my own life. Because—for example, healthy communities—one of the things about healthy communities is people have access to: guess what? Fruits and vegetables. (laughter)

### **The Farm as Part of the Counterculture of the Sixties and Seventies**

**Farmer:** Yes. So was there anything I didn't ask you that you wanted to talk about for the record?

**Skolnik:** I would mention that there were some of the best meals of anyone's life cooked at the Farm Project with that produce. (laughs) We ground the flour; we cooked on an open fire. We baked on an open fire, which was interesting. And food—it would be wonderful if food could taste that good for a lot of people.

---

That would be great, because it was amazing. It set me up for appreciation of that for the rest of my life. We had goats for goat milk. We had chickens. There were draft horses. One of my friends there, a woman, was the horse woman. The horses did some of the field work. Tractors came later. I remember that was a big controversy, but we never directly encountered it. I think, with the exception of grain, that seventeen acres supplied a vegetarian diet. I think there was talk about growing wheat. I don't know if any of the years [of apprentices] ever grew grains and harvested it. But seventeen acres, which is a relatively small amount of land, seemed big, big, big then. Seventeen acres seemed like really a lot of land, and it was, compared to the Garden. The Garden just fit into this crazy hillside. The Farm was vast. Now I realize it's relatively small, but grown in the ways that food is grown on that farm, it can feed a lot of people year round with the [French] Intensive growing method. So now it does serve as a model of that kind of thing, with all the tree crops. It is part of a movement. I think that's absolutely the right word. It's its own special case, because it's an academic venture as well, has research and all that, which is wonderful. But it's part of a network of efforts like that that. They haven't stopped. They're still going on.

Another thing we haven't talked about, actually, is the fact that we were kind of all— I was one of, like, the least hippie people there. If you had seen me, you probably would have called me a hippie. We were really a countercultural people. There were some high-ups in the university who were responsible for this. They tolerated us. I don't know if that would ever happen now, but we were living on university land. We had the support of probably some key players, who negotiated for us, I'm sure, some of whose names I remember. It was an

amazing venture in that way as well. Because, the men all had really long hair, you know. Well, that's not all true, but a lot of facial hair, a lot of just really countercultural lifestyles on university land.

One more thing to add. I remember this landmark day in the Farm, when there was a gathering with Robert Rodale of *Organic Gardening* magazine. That magazine was *the* way to get the word out about organic gardening and farming at that point. He came and visited the Farm Project. It was probably in 1971, along with one of my absolute favorite people in the world, Wendell Berry. Oh, my goodness! They were both there. They came to visit. It would be interesting to find out how they found out about the UCSC Farm.

---

<sup>1</sup> See the Tim Galarneau interview in this series for the story of how Campus Dining Services began contracting with the Farm and with ALBA for organic produce.

<sup>2</sup> See the oral history with Steve Kaffka in this series.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (Penguin 2006).

<sup>4</sup> On the weekend of July 27-29, 2007 CASFS held a reunion and celebration of four decades of pioneering work in sustainable agriculture.

<sup>5</sup> See the Melody Meyer and the Ken Kimes/Sandra Ward oral histories for more about Santa Cruz Trucking.

<sup>6</sup> Veritable Vegetable began in 1974 and is now the nation's oldest distributor of organic produce.

<sup>7</sup> The first Earth Day celebration and teach-in took place on April 22, 1970, in various locations around the United States.

<sup>8</sup> See the Orin Martin, Beth Benjamin, and Jim Nelson oral histories in this series for more about Alan Chadwick's era at the UCSC Farm and Garden.

<sup>9</sup> See the oral history with Russel and Karen Wolter in this series.

<sup>10</sup> See the oral history with Melody Meyer in this series.

<sup>11</sup> See the oral history with Betty Van Dyke in this series.

<sup>12</sup> Rainbow Grocery was started by a spiritual community, an ashram that existed in San Francisco in the early 1970s. The first store opened in 1975 on 16<sup>th</sup> street near Valencia in San Francisco. See: <http://www.rainbow.coop/aboutus/history.html> for a detailed history of Rainbow Grocery.

<sup>13</sup> See the oral history with Jeff Larkey of Route One Farms in this series.

<sup>14</sup> See Randall Jarrell and Maya Hegege, *The Early History of the UCSC Farm and Garden* (Regional History Project, 2003) <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/farmgarden.html> for an interview with Dennis Tamura.

<sup>15</sup> See oral history with Jerry Thomas in this series.

<sup>16</sup> See oral history with Jim Cochran of Swanton Berry Farm. Swanton Berry Farm was founded in 1983 by Jim Cochran and Mark Matze. In 1987 the farm was certified by CCOF, becoming the first organic strawberry farm in California.