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Title
Ken Kimes & Sandra Ward: New Natives Farm

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/59c268gt

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Publication Date
2010-05-01

Supplemental Material
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/59c268gt#supplemental

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Ken Kimes & Sandra Ward

Photo by Ellen Farmer

New Natives Farm

Both Ken Kimes and Sandra Ward grew up in Southern California. They met in the Los Angeles area, but moved to Santa Cruz in 1980. Together they founded New Natives Farm, a greenhouse-based farm certified by California Certified Organic Farmers in 1983, and located in Corralitos, California. There they tend organic sprouts, including alfalfa, wheat grass, pea shoots, sunflower sprouts, broccoli, and beans. In addition to managing their farm full time, Kimes and Ward are both outspoken activists dedicated to the sustainable agriculture movement. They are longtime members of California Certified Organic Farmers. Kimes served on the board of Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) for many years, and worked for Santa Cruz Trucking, an organic foods distribution company affiliated with the local health food cooperative, Community Foods. In this oral history, conducted by Ellen Farmer on May 3, 2007, at New Natives Farm, Kimes and Ward share their recollections, impressions, and opinions of the organic farming movement over the past thirty years.

Additional Resources:

New Natives Farm: http://www.newnatives.com/

Nancy Weimer, "Sprouts Have Grown Up: Meet Shoots and Greens," *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, Wednesday, March 5, 2008.

Farmer: This is May 3, 2007, and this is Ellen Farmer. I'm with Ken Kimes and Sandra Ward of New Natives. We're going to talk about their over twenty-year-old organic sprout project.

Kimes: Twenty-six years.

Early Background

Farmer: All right. Each of you take a turn answering this question: Where were you born and where did you grow up?

Kimes: I was born in Southern California, in Loma Linda. My father sold farm equipment, and he'd been selling farm equipment since he got out of the service after World War II. So we were moving around in relation to his work doing that. When I was born, he was selling it retail. He was working out of San Bernardino. Then we fairly soon moved to Phoenix [Arizona], where he sold farm equipment, because there used to be a lot of farms in Phoenix. Then we moved to Indio, because there was lots of cotton growing and different things down there. He managed a dealership there. Then the same owner had a dealership in Yuma, so we spent a year in Yuma. The family hated it, (laughter) because it's a very out-of-the-way place, to put it kindly. Then we moved back up to Riverside, which is a lot more urbane, so to speak, and he managed a

dealership there. That dealership—they eventually stopped selling farm equipment, and began to sell construction equipment. And that became his trade, because the farms in Southern California were going away, so there were no farms to sell to, particularly. So he went into construction, selling construction equipment. He was always an outside salesman after he gave up management, and spent a lot of time driving around Los Angeles.

I spent the rest of my formative years in Riverside, from about the age of six on. Sandra and I met in Riverside. Sandra is a year younger than I am. And we moved up here together, to Santa Cruz County.

Farmer: And Sandra, what about you?

Kimes: Well, I like to say I was born in Paris, but it was Paris, California.

Farmer: Oh. (laughs)

Kimes: Which is actually Hemet, because that's the only place that had a hospital. (laughter) But I actually grew up on a piece of land in Elsinore, California. I think we had about five acres, and my father planted a bunch of walnuts. When I was in my little bassinet, my mother was picking the neighbor's almonds, and I still remember what that smelled like. So, almonds and persimmons. We lived actually in a little mud shack. They moved from Burbank to— Kind of like moved back to the land, because my older sister was really ill, and so my mother wanted to move back to the country, and she got goats and put her on goat milk. My sister had lost all of her hair, and she was bald. I think she was about three or four years old. My mother got a garden and the goats,

and actually got her hair back. Never got her hearing back, but that was the reason why we moved out to the sticks.

We lived in a little mud shack, and before I was five I have lots of memories of being naked and walking out in the chamomile fields and smelling that. I have lots of memories of being a little kid out there in the sticks loving every bit of it.

We moved to Riverside when I was about five. It's kind of interesting that Kenny and I paralleled all that time. I met Kenny when I was in my early twenties in Riverside. We moved up to Santa Cruz in 1980. We moved up when the smog was so bad in Riverside that you couldn't see the tops of the palm trees. It was that bad. And it had been that bad. We had left for a summer. We went to Colorado. There we remembered about blue skies and white clouds. And then when we came back, forget it, we had to get out of there. Yes. It was really bad.

We moved up here in the eighties. Shortly after that, I started doing a little bit of growing. Kenny went to work in produce so we got into more of the food side of it. That's where we stayed and just progressed through there.

Kimes: You should mention that your mom had an old-folks' home with folk medicine going.

Ward: Oh, yes. Well, my mother *was* a healer. She took care of seniors, elderly people. So not only did I empty their chamber pots first thing in the morning, I also would be giving them their green drink during the day. She would blend them up a drink full of dandelions and mustards and all kind of drinks, and give

them that, and then she would dye their hair orange. We were all just a very happy family. Very colorful. She was also a redhead. (laughter)

Farmer: And this seems to have lasted throughout your whole life, this idea of green—

Ward: It has. Yes, the green drink definitely did, and all of that. In that way I have followed in my mother's footsteps. She was very proud of me when she found out what I was doing, because that was definitely right up her line. Her aunt, my Great-Aunt Eliza was a midwife, and also one with herbs. She was a midwife, a preacher, a Baptist preacher, and a woman of herbs. A lot of the poultices and things that my mother learned, she learned from my Aunt Eliza.

Farmer: And where was she from?

Ward: She came and stayed with us when I was a little girl, but I think originally they were all from Kentucky, back there. Pictures I see of her, she had her big Bible right under her arm. She went to those prayer meetings every night. She was a very solid woman. (laughs) Very solid.

Farmer: So did either of you have any formal education, or anything to do with agricultural things in school? Or was it all intuitive?

Kimes: No. When I met Sandra, she had a nice little house in downtown Riverside, and she had a great garden. I had done some gardening as a kid, but not very much. I had a landscaping route in Riverside, which consisted mostly of

mowing lawns, because that's what Southern California is mostly about, is mowing lawns (laughter), endlessly mowing lawns.

Moving to Santa Cruz and Starting to Grow Wheat Grass

But some friends had moved to Santa Cruz, people we'd known for quite a while. They said, "You guys should come on up here. It's great!" He knew that I had been working on lawns, and knew a wheatgrass business was for sale up here. He was working for The Juice Club, which was the predecessor to Odwalla, the badly-managed predecessor to Odwalla. But it did prove that there was huge niche for fresh juice. There was a wheatgrass grower who was growing for that business. This was Harvey Miller. He had two health food stores in town, one on Pacific Avenue and one on 41st [Avenue], and they were called Miller's Harvest.

Farmer: This was in the late seventies?

Kimes: This was in the early eighties. We moved up here with the intention of buying that wheat grass business. But when we expressed interest in buying it, the people who wanted to sell it, who were named Windspring and Rainbow (perfect), decided it was too valuable to sell, so they didn't sell it to us. (laughter) So we found other work. Eventually they just gave up and went away to Hawaii and we took over the business. Ultimately we didn't have to buy it. And then we just kept going. Initially, Sandra was doing it. Even before we bought that business, Sandra was growing wheatgrass in our garage on Prather Lane in Live Oak, 30th Avenue and Prather. We had a garage, and she grew some wheatgrass

there, and took it over to the deli at Miller's Harvest on 41st Avenue, and sold it to them.

Farmer: Was that every day, you would do that?

Ward: It seemed like twice a week, something like that. Whenever they would need it, I would take it over to them.

Kimes: Yes. Then Sandra started growing the wheatgrass for The Juice Club in a little greenhouse that had already been established to do that.

Ward: That was over on Chanticleer in Live Oak.

Kimes: It was evident that we needed more space, so Sandra called about a greenhouse space we saw in the paper for rent. That was out here in Corralitos, out on Browns Valley Road. That was our friend Rocky, who was doing house plants in these two ranges of greenhouses. He was in one range, and he rented us the other range. That was real fortuitous, and he was real kind to us because we didn't know what the *heck* we were doing. We didn't have a *clue*! (laughter) We had absolutely no idea what we were up to. We were just winging it in the most amazing way. I can't even tell you how little we knew about what we were doing. So we moved into that greenhouse and started working pretty successfully, I guess. It was a ton of work and the returns were not particularly good.

Then we found a place to live out here in this area that was fairly close to the greenhouse so we could stop driving back and forth. That was nice, because it

was further up in the hills, and we got to live up in the woods, which was a real experience for us, being from Southern California. We kept that greenhouse going for about six years, and then Rocky wanted it back to grow plants in. So we needed to look for another place.

A friend of ours, Heidi Hanson, her parents had a car dealership down in Watsonville. She was working at the Five Mile House out here in Corralitos, which used to be a little natural food store out this way, a regional natural food store for this end of the county. She said, "You gotta talk to this guy, John Larkin," a longtime organic farmer, kind of by default as much as anything, because he just didn't use chemicals. He was out at the end of Merk Road out here. He was managing the land for Richard Fagioli, which is the land we're on now.

We said okay, because we'd looked everywhere for a greenhouse. We couldn't find a greenhouse space that would work for us, because we wanted to grow organically and all of them were packed up against commercial growers. It was pretty evident that they were going to have a problem with us growing organically.

Farmer: Is it because they might spray, and it might get on your crops?

Kimes: Oh, they were as worried about us as we were about them.

Ward: Yes.

Farmer: Tell me more about that.

Ward: That we would infest them because we're not killing everything. That we would let anything live was just too much for them to take. We'd go there, and it was like, oh, my goodness. We were afraid to walk, because everything was so killed, you know. How were we going to share water? What if the runoff— Oh, my goodness. Just toxic, you know. How are we going to do this?

The Medfly Crisis

Kimes: Yes, it was really difficult. But I need to go back just a little bit. And that is that in the middle of growing out here in Browns Valley, about two years into it, or maybe even less, there was some kind of a pest, an apple pest. They quarantined the county, or they were threatening to quarantine the county, and they quarantined Santa Clara County. It was a really bizarre time. You would drive over to San Jose, and at night they would fly helicopters over San Jose, dropping malathion on the entire frigging town and populace. They would fly helicopters in formation of eight, and they would fly a grid over San Jose dropping malathion on everybody. Your car would get splattered. We went over there one night and got underneath it, and your car is all splattered with malathion.

Farmer: Oh!

Kimes: So we're working in the greenhouse one day, and the state agricultural commissioner had threatened to quarantine Santa Cruz County if we came up with this pest in Santa Cruz County, medfly in the apples. All of a sudden this

helicopter shows up across the street, and there're people out there picking apples, and this guy is spraying the crap out of a helicopter all over this orchard.

Ward: And the people. Everybody.

Kimes: So we closed up the greenhouse as quick as we could, and called the ag commissioner, and of course they didn't get around to it for a week or two. And when they came out they said, "Well, we called up the applicator and he said it didn't happen."

Ward: Maybe it had rained. There was water in the driveway and rainbows all along in the water. You could see just everywhere, so much rainbow, so much oil and stuff. It was unreal.

Kimes: They were trying to fight the medfly off, and trying to fight off the quarantine, so this guy was doing everybody a service by spraying all the apples in the Pajaro Valley for five bucks an acre.

Farmer: It was just a little private deal so they wouldn't get quarantined. Oh! So it "never happened."

Kimes: Yes. Well, I think the quarantine actually affected the farmers' market. The quarantine happened somewhere between Aptos and Live Oak.

Farmer: And it was the Live Oak Farmers' market at Live Oak School that was affected?

Kimes: Mm-hmm. They had to move in order to sell apples because they couldn't take them across the quarantine line, as I understand it. Jerry Thomas[1] could fill you in better on that. The line was somewhere along there, so they had to move the market down to Aptos.

Farmer: Farther south.

California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF)

Kimes: Yes, further south. So it had an effect on that. The effect it had on us was, I had been hearing about this group called the California Certified Organic Farmers, so I thought, you know, if we're going to farm organically we're going to need some buddies.

Ward: Yes.

Kimes: I mean, when the ag commisioner shows up and tells you that what you saw didn't happen because the applicator said it didn't happen, you go, I need some pals. (laughter) We need some cohorts in this thing.

So we called them up, and they said, "Well, yes. We're going to have a meeting. You should come by." [casual voice] There were about, I don't know, ten or eleven people?

Ward: Yes.

Kimes: It was Mary Webb and Jerry Thomas.

Ward: Barney Bricmont.[2]

Kimes: Russel and Karen [Wolter][3], [Nick] Pasqual[4], and there was some Portuguese guys from out here, and I forget their names, because they didn't stick around very long. Anyway, there were a couple of other people. And Bill Denevan, I think, was there early too, wasn't he, [from] Happy Valley?

Ward: Maybe. They were mainly older farmers.

Kimes: They were.

Farmer: And where did they have this first meeting?

Kimes: It was in Watsonville at the ag extension office. They were all very nice and really welcoming. They were glad to see somebody show up, and I think we were the youngest ones in the bunch. Which was interesting, because it's so changed now. I mean, it's such a young person's up-and-coming business. But at that time, we were the youngest ones there. We were, what, thirty-something? Somewhere in that range.

They were all great. They had their little inspection regime, and they had a set of standards that were just barely codified in law. It was the most rudimentary law in the world. It said something like organically grown produce is defined as produce that is not— I can't remember exactly, but the dividing line was whether or not the product you were using was synthetic or of natural origins. But there was no enforcement in the law. There was no way to enforce the law. It was under the health department. It wasn't under the ag department. The health department didn't want to know about it. They were like, please, don't even call

us on this issue. We have no idea what we're doing. Well, of course they didn't say that, but—

So we went to the meeting, and then they came out and inspected. Jerry Thomas came out and did our first inspection. I have the copies of that, I think. I have a copy of that and it's a farm visit. So we wander around and we talk. Then he goes back to the meeting, and at the meeting he gets up and makes a report on his inspection. He says, "Yes. It was a pretty nice little place. It was all neat. It has these little rows all there and everything. It was a pretty neat little place. I think we should let them in the club." (laughs) Janet Brians was there early too, from over there in the Gilroy area.[5]

So we went along like that. Then Barney started to convene meetings around trying to get a new law passed. (I'm kind of losing the thread of this thing.) But we were trying to pull together a meeting with people on the North Coast, because there was a North Coast and there was the Central Coast [group] of the CCOF. They weren't all that in line with each other about who was going to use what, and what the actual standards really were. So Barney would have meetings at the Live Oak School; people would drive down from up north and we'd try to hash out these issues. A lot of what you find in the 1990 California Organic Food Act was worked out by Barney and the gang over at Live Oak School, the basic kind of standards. But I have to say that Mark Lipson[6] and folks like that played a really big, important part of finishing that bid up and actually getting it passed, if I'm remembering this correctly. I'm not totally sure I am.

Farmer: So it started grassroots, volunteer.

Kimes: Totally. With people who had a thought about growing without chemicals.

Early Perceptions of Organic Farming

Farmer: There was Rodale's *Organic Gardening* magazine that people could follow. But other than that, do you know of any other resources that people were using?

Kimes: No. I remember an unusual meeting once at the Extension Office in Watsonville. The University of California at Davis was talking about putting some money into research in sustainable or organic agriculture. They were going around and doing these listening sessions as to whether or not farmers wanted to do that. Somebody was trying to make this happen. But they had been given a mandate to go around and talk to farmers and see if they wanted it to happen. Well, the meeting in Watsonville was packed with a bunch of conventional growers who didn't want anything to do with this. They didn't want any money spent on it. I think Sandra and I were the only organic farmers there, and tried to stick up for organic farming that we knew almost nothing about. I remember these old guys. They'd say things like "Yes! I got two rows of strawberries at the edge of my field. I never spray those or do nothing, and they're full of bugs. That's what organic is! Full of bugs."

Ward: Yes. And organic is lazy. "They're only organic because they don't want to pull the weeds and clean it up." That was their idea. That was what organic was all about, do-nothing farming.

Kimes: Yes, a bunch of hippies, and they're going to spread— And in the apples they were really concerned that the organic farmers were going to spread bugs all over the valley, because they weren't spraying the *bugs* like they needed to. There was just a load of crap to wade through. There's a lot of prejudice that still exists today. There's a huge push-back, a really big huge push-back.

I remember I got into an argument with one of the farmers there. He was a real adamant user of chemicals and a real believer in chemical farming. After the meeting we got into an argument out in the hallway. All these meetings are contentious. He is going on: "You can't farm that way. It's not going to work. There is no way anybody could farm without these chemicals. These are the product of human intelligence and research, and we've come to this point, and why go backwards in human history?" A lot of these chemicals, of course, are made from petroleum originally. I said, "Well, what are you going to do when we have another oil embargo and you can't get these chemicals?" And he looks at me, and he takes about two seconds and he goes, "We'll just dominate them." (laughter) I'm like, well, okay. Not much I can say to that. And you know what? It came true, didn't it? It's all about dominating them at this point. It's all about getting the oil out of the Middle East, no matter what it takes. We're going to do that. So he's right. He had it. Twenty years ago he had figured out exactly how we were going to conduct our foreign policy.

He came over here once to visit. We showed him our soil, which was just beautiful! I turned it over for him and it was just amazing, amazing. And he jumped out of his skin. You could see it. He goes, "Oh, my God! You gotta kill

that." Because of all the organisms. You know, we had worms. Things you couldn't even see. But he could sense that that [soil] was full of life— And it scared him to death. It scared him. He was just absolutely terrified.

Kimes: He said, "The first thing I'd have to do is sterilize this place."

Ward: First thing: "Kill that." Very interesting.

Kimes: We got a lot of that early on. A lot of that push-back.

Farmer: Wow. And that brings up the food safety conversation now.

Ward: Yes, here we are again.

Kimes: We were especially grateful for John Larkin's help here, because he took a big risk on us. We were really green farmers. He showed us one place and then he said, "Well, I've got this other place. We just bought it." Because Richard Fagioli had just bought the place and John was his manager. He says, "Yes, you can move in over there and build a greenhouse." So he brings us over here and shows us. And we're like, well, this is lot of work. The house was like a tenement, basically, inside, but workable. And he actually said, "Okay, sign the lease." And we said, "Well, we're going to have to build a greenhouse." He said, "Fine." So we built the greenhouse down there. Which meant actually tying up their property in a building permit. He took a big chance on us. He really did. I'm really grateful to him for that. He also got Dennis [Tamura] and Lori Perry started. He recruited them.

Ward: From Blue Heron Farms.

Kimes: From Blue Heron. He recruited them from UCSC, because he was always on the Friends of the UCSC Farm [and Garden Board], and was a real supporter of organic farming. He was taking a lot of hits, too, as I understand it, in the Watsonville community, for being an organic farmer. There was a lot of animosity early on about organic farming.

Farmer: Well, did they seem to have a club that was pretty settled when this started up, the conventional farmers? Did they seem pretty comfortable with each other, and they ran the town and all that?

Kimes: Basically. They had the Farm Bureau. They had the Watsonville City Council. They basically were very comfortable and confident and assured in their position. For them, organic farming probably looked like the whole cultural revolution that came out of the sixties and seventies, a bunch of hippie kids and this foolish stuff going on at UCSC. If you talk to Paul Lee[7] he can tell you about the push-back he got up there around the Farm and Garden Project and Alan Chadwick. I mean, there is a positive thing about working against that kind of adversity in that, boy, you get your argument chops down really fast. You got to get real solid in what you believe. You've got to develop your philosophy, and you got to say, okay, I'm here, and I'm going to follow through with this. Because obviously there was no real market. We were actually being hard on ourselves beyond what we needed to, to sell to the organic market, because it was not well defined, what it took to grow organic sprouts. It was a time of not very many of us. In fact, we were the only certified organic sprout growers in friggin' America, I think. (laughter)

Finding Organic Seed

Farmer: Were you able to get organic seed back then?

Kimes: Yes, you could. But it was terrible seed.

Ward: You could tell that they'd send us seed with their tongue in cheek. We would open a bag and I'd say, "They swept this off the floor." It had dirt and everything in it. You could just hear them, "They want organic seed? Okay, give them that stuff over there. That's what they want." It was like, oh, my God. Just amazing. Really. The seed wasn't clean. It just looked like the dregs. It's gotten better as far as that goes, but still. Now it's like, "Oh, they want organic seeds? Okay, give them that and charge them three times the amount. (laughter) Put that label on there. That looks good."

Kimes: Well, the industry is a little bit better than that, because they are actually getting themselves certified at this point as organic, most of them. We always buy certified organic seed. And the inspection regimes are better, and everything else. We always have bought certified organic seed, but, like Sandra says, it's pretty obvious that at one time that was a pretty loose— But we figured, hey, if we keep buying it, sooner or later somebody legitimate is going to go, "Well, there's a market for this. Let's tighten this up. Let's make it real."

Farmer: And that's what's been happening?

Ward: Yes, we just thought it was going to happen a lot quicker. We've been struggling with this for twenty-six years, and CCOF is finally now to the point

where you have to use organic seeds unless you can't find them. That little caveat right there makes it like, okay, that means you don't need to really buy organic seeds because (laughter) you have no choice.

Kimes: But for sprouts you do have to use organic seeds.

Ward: Yes, and that was quite a battle that we took on, to make that stick.

Kimes: That was another fight!

Ward: We're fighting with our comrades, our peers. Why are we fighting this fight with these people? Don't they understand? The reason we started using sunflower seeds was around the medfly thing. I was calling to get some sunflower seeds, and I was just ordering whatever they had (this was before organic, so conventional.) And the woman on the phone, bless her heart, from wherever she was, Kansas or wherever, didn't know me. She goes, "Honey, you don't want that seed." I go, "I don't?" She says, "No. They spray that with paraquat. That's Agent Orange." I go, "Oh." She said, "Yes. That's a defoliant, honey." I said, "You're right. I don't want that." Of course, I knew what it looked like. You just plant it down and it just all pops up in about ten seconds, like a hundred percent gin. It's like, wow! I'll take the organic seeds. And then we get the stuff that's swept off [the floor], and we plant it, and one out of fifty seeds is germinating. But I'd rather deal with that than the other stuff. And I did.

Kimes: Then I was working at Community Foods, or Santa Cruz Trucking, and then we started the greenhouse out here. Sandra was working that [the greenhouse] and it was too much work. So I quit doing [the Santa Cruz Trucking

job], and we started working together at the greenhouse. Then there was a change of hands in town and Heidi Skolnik[8] was buying produce. She said, "You guys want to grow alfalfa sprouts?" We said, "Sure, we'll try it. We'll try anything." She said, "Well, you want organic seed, right?" And we said, "Yes. We do." So those two things put us on that path.

Farmer: Did she know where to get the organic seed?

Kimes: There was some available, organic alfalfa seed.

Farmer: Where did they grow that?

Kimes: Well, it's kind of by neglect. Once again. And who knows, right? Because that was so early on. That was so early on in the whole process. There was so little certification going on. I mean, God, hardly any of the organic produce was actually certified at that point, including seed.

Things have changed quite a bit, but they haven't changed as much as we thought. I'm struggling still to get decent organic sunflower seed, especially. The industry, you know when the national law came into effect, it said (like Sandra said), that you have to use organic seed *except*— So the organic seed growing industry has been slow to develop. It's getting there, but the professional skills still pretty much are resident with the conventional growers. Unless the conventional growers are willing to take on an organic line, because there are so few seed producers there's not an organic product. There's no one really moving out into that area to take that on and do it. I think it's happening more now.

Farmer: There are some seed-saving organizations for heirlooms.

Kimes: The heirloom and the seed-saving thing is one large important area, and it's really important. But what we're talking about is seeds of a pretty stable genetic, predictable line that are produced year after year in a really professional fashion, and cleaned up, and packaged professionally. That's more like vegetable seeds and things like that.

Farmer: So the alfalfa seeds, that's a grain that grows up like wheat?

Kimes: It's a legume, actually.

Farmer: Tell me more about that.

Kimes: Alfalfa is also called lucerne, and it's a legume. It's a bean. The little seed is actually a bean, and I think it comes from Central Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, originally. It's real deep-rooted, and it's the kind of thing that you can mow and bale through the year, and you can get two or three crops out of it. The last thing they do then for the year is they let it go to seed, and they combine the seed out of that. There are some alfalfa fields grown just for seed, and that's different. That's the kind of thing I'm talking about. You can get the kind of seed from somebody who just let their field go. Or you can get the seed that somebody planted specifically, that has a pretty well-defined genetic quality to it, early germination, whatever, it's bred for a certain purpose. That's the kind of seed we would like to have, and that's the kind of seed the industry overall needs for everybody—carrots, lettuce, celery, all that kind of stuff. That's starting to develop. But like I say, those skills really reside with the conventional

growers. They don't reside that much with the organic growers. It's a real set of skills. There's a lot of breeding that goes on. And old-timers. You need some old-timers for that, to pass that on. Then you need some equipment, pretty serious equipment, and [to] know how to operate it, too.

Food Safety and Sprouts

Farmer: Are there special safety concerns around sprouts as a food product that you have to follow, that are beyond organic standards?

Ward: Food safety and sprouts: The main recommendation from the FDA is to do this twenty-thousand-parts-per-million chlorine soak on your seeds. Alfalfa seems to be one of the few that can survive it. Radish and onion and all those other seeds cannot survive that concentration. That concentration is about one cup of chlorine to one cup of water. I don't know of any concentration in that amount that is anywhere else in the food industry. If you are doing a three-stage rinse on your produce it's fifty parts. Now we're talking twenty thousand. They set that up as an emergency that has just been reinstated for the past ten years. I don't think there's any test on it. I find it really dangerous. We stopped growing because that amount of concentration would, in our very, very small operation, mean that we would be using what would be comparable to about 380 gallons of chlorine a week. When you are looking at a substance that really does create cancer, then I couldn't do that, not for myself, not for my employees, not for the water. That recommendation was so punitive, not backed by science.

Farmer: Were they trying to guarantee safety?

Ward: Well, politically, our personal experience was that they were very, very prejudiced about sprout growers. In fact, our first meeting in Northern California at the California Department of Health they gathered Northern California sprout growers together and Southern California sprout growers together. So in this session with the Northern California sprouters, we all came together. We didn't know a lot about what was going on except we had been called to the table. They actually locked us in. They did a PowerPoint presentation, but before they got started, they had one of those big pads that they'd draw on. And the first picture (this is our introduction), the first picture they had a dinosaur eating sprouts. They said, "You guys are out of here."

Kimes: "You guys are dinosaurs. You're extinct."

Ward: That was their "Hello. How are you?"

Farmer: This is the health department?

Ward: Yes, yes. This is the one that wants to oversee the spinach, fresh produce.

Farmer: And this was ten years ago, the sprout thing?

Ward: Yes. It was absolutely so prejudiced and so biased. The agenda was already set. There's no doubt about it. So it wasn't hard to then see that of all of those sprouters in that room from Northern California (there were probably about forty of them), after about three years only three of them were left. And during that time, actually, I got a cold-called appointment from this guy's private

secretary. She came to see me with no business card, not one, nothing in her hand. She just wanted to know if I was growing sprouts.

Kimes: She wanted to know if you were growing alfalfa.

Ward: Or clover. I said, "Well, who are you? And who do you work for?" (laughs) She told me and then she left.

Kimes: She didn't identify herself.

Ward: So that was the way they were conducting themselves. And I think they still are.

Kimes: Prior to all this we used to grow twelve different kinds of sprouts. Now we grow six. We used to grow alfalfa and clover and different things like that. Alfalfa and clover were the ones they were really targeting, that seemed to show up the most in their concerns. They were visiting alfalfa growers on a weekly basis and taking samples and tests and so forth. So we decided to stop growing alfalfa and clover. It's made our lives less stressful.

Ward: Oh, a lot. Because there were even growers that followed everything, all the testing (the testing was over the top), all of the testing that was recommended, and all of the chlorine. And they would come in and still put them out of business. There was nothing you could do. So we said, you know what, we're going to just stop this right now. Alfalfa and clover are great, but this is going to be our business, so we need to stop.

Farmer: Now, did they have people who died from eating bad sprouts?

Ward: The science behind this was really, really bad. The whole thing was really bad.

Kimes: It got started after a big outbreak in Japan from radish sprouts. Five or ten years later, we find out that it wasn't the radish sprouts. It was the meat industry.

Ward: But we knew that at the time.

Kimes: But the Japanese mafia had moved into the situation, had managed to work it out with the officials to blame the radish grower.

Ward: But we knew that at the time. So that was seven thousand people that didn't die, but were becoming ill. But see, I was reading all the background stories of what was going on in Japan. It wasn't just that school cafeteria. It was mass hysteria. People were afraid to go swimming. I mean, it was all over. People were getting sick and they couldn't figure it out. Well, it was in the water. It was from the cattle from the next county. But at that time you could not point fingers. It would be like creating a political or a county war. It was just not done. So nobody could say anything. The prime minister at the time came out and he made a public apology, and said that it was not radish sprouts. That's what he said at that point. Didn't matter. To this day on, the sprouts, they still use that number. That's the only reason that they even got us on— I mean, what? We're all eating sprouts? You tell me how many people in Minnesota were eating sprouts. Something is not right here. So we were the ones that got hit on that because they knew that we were very, very small, not that organized, not

powerful at all. So definitely we took the heat and the brunt of that. And also we got rid of the hippie food that they were so prejudiced against. So it worked in all kinds of ways for them. But still, they are still using that amount of chlorine on the sprouts. It's set this precedent that if you need to have clean food, like food safety, then you need to use a *lot* of chemicals. That's where they are going with it.

Farmer: Or irradiation.

Ward: Well, yes. But you know, if you can't irradiate— I was checking out what was going on. The irradiation was really big. They just had a big huge convention in January on food irradiation that was a brand-new technology. However, alfalfa sprouts and lettuce could not be irradiated. And right after that alfalfa sprouts get hit. It's like, get them out of here! (laughter) We can't make this uniform with these kind of products, or this kind of food being grown, because we can't irradiate it. They just do not follow. They do not fit in this box. Now we have spinach or lettuce or whatever. So it's the same thing.

Kimes: It was a real problem for us to give up growing alfalfa and clover, because it was thirty percent of our income. It really set us back. But it was the right thing to do because it took the target off our chest. They were really, really harassing the alfalfa sprout growers.

Farmer: So does anybody grow them now without using the chlorine?

Kimes: No. And CCOF has managed to encompass in their thinking that this high use of chlorine is actually acceptable for organic standards. It's hard for me

to appreciate the rationale, but it seems to be something along the lines of— Okay, this gets a little technical, but what the national organic law says is that the tailwater off the process, or the farm, or whatever, has to be at drinking-water standards, which is four parts per million chlorine. Above that tailwater point, you can use all the chlorine you want. You can use tons and tons and tons. CCOF has decided that using this amount of chlorine on your alfalfa sprouts is acceptable, and you can call them organic as long as you get the tailwater out at four ppm. The problem is every gallon of this solution, this chlorine solution, needs five thousand gallons of water to dilute it down to four ppm. So people may be saying they're doing it, but economically it's not possible to do that. But CCOF has been certifying growers using this chlorine technique and calling it organic. I think they need to look a little closer, because if they saw the water bills for these people they should be over the top. It's just not—

Ward: It's not happening.

Kimes: You can't do it.

Farmer: It's not practical. And what about the workers? What about people being exposed to all that?

Ward: Well, didn't you just go to a meeting of some sprouters and they were complaining about being—

Kimes: Yes, people's hands were being burned. There is actually a disease that comes from being around too much chlorine. You break out. Miscarriages go up. Respiratory problems are huge. Using that much chlorine— The Department of

Pesticide Regulation came to one of the sprout gatherings that the health department put together and told us that this solution of chlorine and water that we had after we soaked the seeds is a toxic material, and we need to hire a toxic material handler to deal with it. And the Department of Health Services was like, "Oh, don't tell them that; don't tell them that." Because they didn't want it to be thought that they were recommending toxic levels of a chemical.

Now, the interesting little catch in all this is that chlorine is not a food ingredient that the FDA can approve. It's not something they can say, you can put chlorine in food. Right? So they had this recommendation based on some research of a professor out in Georgia that you could use a solution at 20,000 ppm. Since that time, the professor has been like, "Wait a minute. Wait a minute. That was one paper I did. It had no real bearing on the situation. I don't know where you people got that information and I do not know how that ended up as a recommendation as to a practice."

Trying to break that down and get it down to four ppm is almost impossible. It doesn't necessarily do the job, and you can't leave it on the seed for very long. You only leave it on for five minutes so it comes off the seed because chlorine bonds with organic materials and forms dioxin.

Ward: Instantly.

Kimes: The free chlorine comes off at about fifteen thousand ppm, which is so over the top. It's so over the top in terms of a toxic material that it's amazing. So when they do the salad plants down in Salinas they'll release into their holding

ponds water that's at about thirty or fifty parts per million and they have to treat that for almost a week.

Farmer: Can you smell it when you're down there?

Kimes: Yes, oh yes. It rots the fixtures. Because chlorine floats in the air and it actually attacks metal. So it rots all the light fixtures and the metal fixtures in the plant.

Ward: Remember, he's talking about fifty parts. And with the sprouts we're seeing twenty thousand. So you see how suicidal that is?

Farmer: Yes. And weren't those [alfalfa sprouts] the first ones that became popular, that people started putting on salad?

Ward: Yes.

Farmer: They're the really thin, fine ones?

Ward: Yes. It was all timely, by the way. The alfalfa thing did not happen in a vacuum. It happened right with Odwalla, same time as Odwalla.[9] It also happened at exactly the same time that the organic law was becoming federal. All three of these were happening at the same time. Not coincidental. And why alfalfa sprouts? Because who eats alfalfa sprouts?

Farmer: Hippies.

Ward: Hippies or anyone interested in being organic. Now, it was very, very cool because you could just say alfalfa sprouts. You never had to say the term organic.

But in everybody's mind when they read about alfalfa sprouts in the papers, it was always unconsciously connected with organic. Always. They wanted to call into question the health of organic food.

Just before that happened with Odwalla, finally one of the first headlines in the paper was that pesticide levels in food were very high. (snap fingers) The next thing it's Odwalla. No more articles about the pesticide things or anything. It was all about organic. And then raw manure. We're not the ones who are using the raw manure. It is not the organic growers. But it was all shifted on the organic growers. They're the problem. It's still that way with food safety. They're the problems.

Kimes: It's a whole back-and-forth thing. It's like the push-back we got from conventional growers in this area when we first got started. I think they felt assaulted by these people who were questioning their practices. They get their back up, so they have to attack. The best defense is a good offense. So there's this back-and-forth kind of thing at that point.

The Organic Farming Movement

But I got to say, the organic movement never, as far as practitioners of the organic movement and being around people who are certifying organic farmers, we didn't attack conventional agriculture. We just called it "conventional practices." We didn't say "nozzle-head practices," or "spray maniacs," or anything like that. We just said, "Well, that's a conventional farmer. We're organic farmers and that's a conventional farmer." We really didn't go out of our

way to do any gratuitous attacks on these people. But they were so touchy. I mean, that's the thing that really gets to me about the bunch of them. They are just so touchy! They always complain about—I'm really going off here, but—they always complain about politically correct speech, you know. "Ooh, those liberals." But man, they will not tolerate anything that runs counter to their message. I mean, they have no tolerance for— So I was always surprised about how adamant they were when anybody came around that said something different. (laughs)

Farmer: Well, I'm thinking about something that one of our narrators said. "There was no Extension. There was no ag department. There was no support for organic. That's one of the reasons CCOF formed." What do you think? You went to Farm Bureau meetings, right, for some period of time?

Kimes: Yes.

Farmer: What do you think was going on for the conventional farmers that made them so attached to this way? Where did they get that message that this was what they were supposed to do?

Kimes: Well, if you read any of the ag industry press, it's all filled with advertisements for chemical farming. It comes out of the fifties and the post-World War II era, I think, which is that in these modern times we have modern science at our disposal, and we should be using modern methods to do this. They did see better yields. They saw less pest pressure, at least initially, and more return for their effort, initially. I think a fair amount of that return has leveled out

and dropped off relative to organic agriculture. But that's where it comes from. It comes from that—the future is so bright we've gotta wear shades—kind of thing. Science is going to solve all of our problems. And I think it's important to understand, especially now, that the research from universities is paid for by the chemical companies and the ag providers, so to speak. So they're not going to tell you something different. And you can't get money (until very recently, and it's still a very small piece of the pie) to do organic research. Because there's no real— I mean, what do we need, right? We aren't going to buy a whole bunch of crap. So who is going to pay for the research to tell us to buy a bunch of crap? There's more stuff on the market now for organic farmers to buy than there ever has been. But initially there wasn't diddly. There wasn't anything to buy. They weren't going to do research around nothing.

The university, unfortunately (and I'm sure they would contest this) has been sort of hand-in-hand with the conventional chemical industry, or the industry that provides chemicals to conventional ag.

Farmer: When you were first meeting with the organic farmers was there camaraderie around resisting that?

Kimes: Oh, we weren't a particularly militant bunch. We were just trying to survive. We never felt like we needed to go out and protest, or march, or put up signs, or anything. We were just a lonely bunch of people that were like, "Do you think that way?" (whisper) "Yes, I think that way." "Okay, let's meet." (laughter)

Ward: Well, and do what we could to not contribute so many toxins. It was a bigger picture, like the medfly spraying and all the toxic chemicals. What could we do that we wouldn't be contributing to that? That was the main thing. Do something. A little bit of action would help a lot.

Kimes: But we weren't particularly ideologues. Most of the people that we encountered, like the Webbs and the Wolters and folks like that were basically libertarians. They were like: "You do your thing, I do my thing; let's not get in each other's face about it. I'm happy farming without chemicals; go farm with chemicals. I care, but I'm not going to try to stop you from doing that." That's why it was a puzzle for me that conventional farmers would want to stop us from farming organic. Hey, we're all like into freedom here, right? You do your thing and we'll do our thing. But those older folks really were— Like Mary Webb, especially, was a conservative, but she came from the conservative libertarian point of view, which was: "Hey, I'm not going to farm with chemicals. Those ag chemical salesmen, they just want to enslave you with their products." So it was kind of an interesting, populist route, is what I picked up.

They formed the core of CCOF at that point. But they weren't so much forming that organization so that they could go change the world, as much as [so] they could go get themselves a kind of certification and a little camaraderie among friends, so to speak. They were just trying to set some standards, because there had been a lot of fraud going on, and a lot of people claiming organic who weren't. So they were trying to set some standards for that.

Santa Cruz Trucking

Farmer: Tell me about your work with Santa Cruz Trucking.

Kimes: Well, Heidi Skolnik can really fill you in on that. I came into it after they had gotten started and were well underway. Sandra was growing the wheatgrass and we lived on Prather [Lane], across from the Swap Meet. I had been working at The Juice Club and went to work at Santa Cruz Trucking, which was affiliated with Community Foods. There were three of us working there: Deb and Heidi and myself. We had *a* big truck. Heidi had started moving, selling, and distributing produce out of Santa Cruz County up to San Francisco. She had this beat-up old truck that was so dangerous to drive. They had bought a larger truck when I came to work. We kept it on the road most every day of the week.

What we would do was we would drive produce out of Santa Cruz County from people like Bruce Dau, and Russel Wolter, and Route One[10] (I think), and Jerry Thomas. We were the connection for moving produce from Santa Cruz County up to San Francisco, up to Veritable Vegetable, who is still around and has been a real solid supporter of organic farmers forever. I think they were a worker co-op too, and I think they were all women. I'm pretty sure it was all women. We dedicated ourselves to the task in really over-the-top, stupid ways. (laughter) It was absolutely dangerous at times!

Ward: How about when you used to drive the truck up there and take your alarm clock and sleep in the back of the box truck?

Kimes: Yes.

Ward: (laughter) Get up at three in the morning and go to the produce docks.

Kimes: I had this crazy gig I did, where I'd start at seven o'clock on Monday morning. I'd go into the office and I'd take orders from all the little natural food stores all over Santa Cruz County. We'd haul produce, cheese, grains, bread, milk, all kinds of different things out of the City back to Santa Cruz. Everything we could find we would buy up there and bring back and resell it to these natural food stores.

Farmer: And Veritable Vegetable didn't find it for you, it sounds like.

Kimes: Anything that was organic, they would order. At that time what would happen was the stores would say, "I want two bags of red onions. I would prefer organic." We'd go, okay. Anything that we couldn't find organic (because there was a lot we couldn't find), we'd buy conventionally. Some stores would say, "If you can't find it organic I don't want it." Others would say, "I don't want that organic stuff. I want conventional." That was very, very rare. It was a really loose assortment of people doing ad-hoc work on a day-by-day basis.

So anyway, I would start on Monday morning, and I'd take these orders. Then in the afternoon, after I'd gotten that all organized, I would go down to Moss Landing. Throughout the day, farmers would bring us produce at Community Foods, and we would load it on the truck and turn on the cooler if we were good. Then in the afternoon I would go down to Moss Landing and pick up Russel's stuff. And we would try to fill up the truck with whatever we had here: lettuce, apples. We took some bread products up I think, for Staff of Life [in Santa Cruz].

Different things that we could find here to take up. I'd take them up and drop them off up there, unload the truck up there. Then I would determine what Veritable had for us that was organic, and what I needed to buy conventionally. I would sleep in the back of the truck, and it was in a semi-dangerous part of San Francisco, not too hard, but I'd climb in the back of the truck and I'd lock the doors shut with the load bar. (laughter)

Farmer: I'm sure that was really comfortable, too. (laughs)

Kimes: Oh, God. And then get up at three. I would usually finish up at eleven o'clock or twelve o'clock at night, and then I'd get up at three. I'd go down to the conventional market, which is an experience in itself. It's a lot of stalls. They're large stalls, but it's a whole bunch of Italians and Japanese. It goes way, way back. It's an old thing. It's a fresh market, I guess is what you call it. It's a produce district. It's all a bunch of docks, and pallets of produce, and these salesmen, who are all hyped up, for some reason, at three o'clock in the morning.

Farmer: Coffee.

Kimes: Yes. Actually, when you get there at three, you're getting there late. If you want to really get there [early] you get there at midnight or one in the morning. And you walk the dock and actually buy the produce off the dock from these Italian guys. They were always ripping me off. (laughter) There were two of us that stood out that shopped there. I was from Santa Cruz. I had long hair and a beard. And then the guy from Green Gulch, the Zen center, who had no hair. Occasionally we'd find ourselves on the dock at the same time and

acknowledge each other as being the two stand-outs. But when I'd walk down the dock, these old guys would go, "San-ta Cruz. San-ta Cruz! How you doin'? Santa Cruz? Come on over here. Come over here. I got some peaches for you. Come here, come here, come here." They were just irresistible, totally over-the-top characters. Sandra used to go with me up there once in a while. They'd show you a stack of peaches, maybe ten or fifteen boxes. The top box would be great. "But don't touch 'em. Don't touch 'em!" They'd get livid with you. And the last three boxes would be [awful]. If you really wanted to do it right you had to break down the stack and look at every box. But get so like, "You don't trust me? What's the matter? Have I ever done this to you before?" "Yes. Last week."

Farmer: (laughter)

Kimes: It was nuts. I was so unprepared for this kind of commerce. It was just not a part of the culture I grew up in. (laughter) I got beat up every single week at that market. But you'd just tell them, "Okay, I'll take that stack." Then they would run it out to your truck for you. We'd would put it on, and I'd have about half a truck of produce at that time. Then I'd start my journey around San Francisco, picking up grains and cheese and whatever else. I remember one time I had all the produce loaded on, I was driving south out of South San Francisco and I got pulled into a truck inspection station. They had me drive the truck across the scale. The highway patrol officer had me pull over, and he went around and checked the brakes, got down on a scooter and went underneath the truck and checked the brakes, and looked the truck over and everything. When he got done he said, "Your truck looks good and you've got it loaded perfectly

front axel to back axel, and you are right at your limit." He says, "That's great." The problem was that I still had half my load to put in. (laughter)

We would drive that truck at twice of what it was supposed to have in terms of weight on that truck. It was really dangerous. We would load it up with grain. By the time we got that truck loaded and headed down to Santa Cruz, we would be throwing things into the truck in order to get them in the truck, because we had packed it right up to the back doors. It was so full of stuff it was nuts.

Then I'd get down to Santa Cruz, and start over on the Westside at the Westside Co-op at about one or two in the afternoon. I was trying to unload from this truck that had been loaded in a big jumble. I'd hand the people on their dock the list of stuff I was supposed to have for them, and they'd start calling it out, and they'd start climbing all over the load trying to find this stuff. It was just nuts! (laughter) They're like, "Okay, we need three rounds of Jarlsberg cheese." So I'm looking at this pallet of cheese that's completely stacked, and the Jarlsberg is on the bottom, and I'm laying on my stomach on top of the grain going, how the hell am I going to get Jarlsberg from underneath there?

I'd go from there to Staff of Life, out to Community Foods, and I'd go up to the People's Co-op in Felton, and I would wind up basically done at about seven o'clock Tuesday night, after starting at seven o'clock on Monday morning. Complete zombie. Total zombie. A million mistakes on the invoices— stuff that didn't get loaded that should have gotten loaded, things that are the wrong price. Just a mess, because it was such a screwy system to try and basically warehouse out of your truck, and distribute out of a truck loaded with all of this stuff.

And we paid ourselves like five bucks an hour, I think, because we were a workers co-op. Solidarity with the organic movement. (laughter) Nobody would— Well somebody might, but hardly anybody would do that kind of work today for that kind of pay. But we were trying to make a difference, I guess, and we worked our asses off.

Farmer: That was the organic *movement*.

Kimes: Right. That was the organic movement, right. That was people really trying to make it happen, is what it was. Oh God. What a ton of work. Sandra and I carried that philosophy into our greenhouse. Working with organic seed to the exclusion of conventional seed has given us the same kinds of trials and tribulations, because it's *never* as good as conventional seed at this point. Even then, it was just terrible. Trying to push the organic philosophy and stay with it, for the early adopters, was difficult. It really was. You encountered a lot of problems. That's where the old-timers came in, because they had developed some skills in dealing with those problems.

Farmer: Who are you thinking of?

Kimes: The Wolters, the Webbs, people like that. The Brians.

Ward: The Pasquals. They developed a great philosophy. (laughter) We'd just go listen to Nick and go, "Okay. Okay I think we can do this." I know it's important. Listen to this guy.

Kimes: Yes, he was sweet, really sweet. And good to us, too.

Ward: So that was the organic movement. And all the rest of these newcomers? Just a bunch of pikers! (laughter)

Farmer: Because you made it successful, now they want to get in.

Kimes: That's right. Well, you know, every cultural movement has its early adopters. They hang out there on the edge for a while until it starts to become part of the culture. I wouldn't say that organic is even still a mainstream item. But it's certainly a lot larger than it was.

Sustainable Agriculture

Farmer: What does sustainable agriculture mean to you? You can each give your own answer.

Ward: Sustainable means something that you can feed and it can feed you. It's a closed system. And it doesn't really break down, actually it builds. All of those terms. That's what sustainable means to me. It's like, giving and getting something in return. It's not just: taking, taking, taking. To me, even more [important] than sustainable agriculture, [is] being sustainable as a person. It's like having a relationship with the environment, where mystery, and sacred, those terms that we never even hear about, are very, very important. It's where the unseen is every bit as present as the glaring. All those things to me are sustainable, and that's because the root of it is that it's a complete system. It's a system that's been developed outside of ourselves: nature. It's still full of mysteries and all kinds of unknowable things. And even though we don't know them, they're still very vital to the whole process of living, and life, and the

whole cycle that we don't really understand a lot of. It's taking us out of the center, realizing that we're not the center, that we're just part of it. So we can actually recognize and see, at least get a glimpse of how much bigger, and how much more mystery and magic and sacred it is, and we can actually be part of it and not try to dismantle it. Sustainable is being part of something and helping it stay as one, or one unit, or complete, or still working, and not look at everything as if it's yours and you're just going to take it, take from it until it dries up and blows away. It's definitely a relationship.

Sustainable in agriculture is something where you give back. You're given and you give back. It is always that back and forth. It's breathe in, breathe out. So that the whole organism—our bodies, our natural environment will remain living, will remain alive, will have some life that as it changes, it needs to change, it still has life to do that. To me, it goes deeper in those ways. It's all of it. It's the whole thing. Being sustainable. The caring for and acknowledging of the sad state of the environment, how we've just done nothing but take. We just take.

Demand is growing for organic. The percentage of people, twenty percent, I think, of people wanting organic food. That's the largest growth in industry, and it's happening right now around organic. And that's, once again, why we get even more of that attack from the government. "Organic? They've got no products that they're going to buy from us!" (laughter) What is this?" So that's my small answer for a big question.

Farmer: Do you have your own answer, Ken?

Kimes: Yes, the tough thing about sustainability, of course, is it's not well defined, but it tends to imply energy in and energy out—that the amount of resources going in is equal to or less than the resources coming out. If you start to really think deeply about that, you find that everything is connected to everything else. So you can have a sustainable farm, and I think that's really great. That's based on, basically, sunlight—sunlight, air, and water through chlorophyll producing more material, green mass. You can feed that to cattle; you can eat it. You can do all those things. But you can't actually on a farm produce more than the materials you might physically import yourself to that farm. Because nature has supplied you with sunlight, air and water and the plants grow. You just provide a place for them to grow. The tough part is that when you try to take sustainability beyond that system, you start to run into all kinds of things. Because, is it sustainable to have this big of a population on the planet? Not really, as it turns out. Is it sustainable to use this much hydrocarbon fuel? Not really. So in a worldwide sense, we're really far off of a sustainable world, so to speak, as governed by humans. Prior to the really huge increase in human population, I think it was a sustainable world, and I think it was producing more energy than it was taking, for its biomass, because of what I mentioned before. So sustainable is a tough term to think into, and really go somewhere with. It really confronts us, if we think hard about it.

Labor Issues

Farmer: That leads me to a question about the people who work for you who are part of the system. Can you talk about what your experience has been with labor?

Ward: Interesting. It's been a learning curve. At first we were young, and we got to hire our friends and that was really great. And work with them. I had a friend come in and work with us last month, and now she works at the market. It's terrible. She goes, "You're too cheap! All the work you do? That's too cheap. You better raise your prices. If they only knew what you did." (laughter) So that really backfired.

Anyway, Kenny and I, for years we fought hiring the Mexican crew. All the other farms had them. We didn't want to do that. We wanted, not so much to exclude them, but we didn't want to set up that sort of hierarchy. We really have battled and battled with that, to the point where we've hired a lot of college students who have never worked a lick, don't know the first thing about systems, don't even know how to work. We just got to the point where, we're not going to do this again, because everyone we bring in that's a young kid, we have to teach them how to work. I think it's good for them, but now not only are we trying to grow food, we're trying to grow people! (laughs) It's like, yow! So we started in slow. We hired two women. They just walked in the door and I said, okay.

Kimes: You're talking about two Mexican women.

Ward: Two Mexican women. Celia and Adelia. They had come from the Green Giant canneries, no jobs. So we put them to work on our sunflower sink and I'm going, oh, my goodness they know how to work. Look at this. Look at the difference. (laughs) It was like night and day. Didn't have to tell them anything. Didn't have to show them how to move. Didn't have to point out why you are efficient. You know, we're not trying to turn you into a robot, but you don't expend all this extra energy on movements that aren't necessary for the job at hand. You have to make every movement very efficient. Why do you do this? Because if you don't do that, you'll get the work done, but you'll be totally exhausted.

These women knew how to work. Then we interspersed more white kids that really wanted to work at a sprout farm, really wanted to work on an organic farm. They thought it was the coolest thing. And it was like, okay, I learned really quick. You want to be here? Okay? You think this is the really cool thing. But what you have no idea about is how you work. You don't know how to work. They'd watch us and go, "You guys are nuts! You guys are crazy." "This is working. This is what's involved here. This is how you work."

Celia has been with us for ten or eleven years. That's the other thing, they come to work every day. In fact, we are always nagging them, "You *have* to take a break. You have to stop working and take a break." They think the more hours they can work, (and that doesn't mean slow down, that just means do more work), the more they get paid. It's like, "Great, but we can only pay you for this much. So you're only going to work eight hours. You're going to take breaks.

We're not going to have the *Federales* coming in here and telling us that we're slave drivers. *You* are going to take breaks." It's kind of hard for them to— They look at us as the endless pot of money. "No, it doesn't work that way. What we sell, is what we make. And you guys are really helping us get that out the door, but there's only so much. You have to go home. You have to sleep. We have to start another day." So it's a little bit different value system. It's not an endless thing. "I can work twelve hours!" I say, "Absolutely not. You're not working twelve hours."

Farmer: Well, there's that overtime thing that happens in factories, or maybe in the processing plants. But certainly in the fields, if you are doing piecework.

Ward: Oh, yes. They work them much harder. But we don't. Our work is year round, weekends off for most. Maybe one or two people are working on the weekends. So it's year round, and it's every day, and we pay them good. We give them profit sharing. We still have our white kids, or white people, dispersed with the Mexicans. But hands-down, it's the work ethic. There's got to be a work ethic. I know I picked it up from my family. Kenny picked it up from his family. Now, I don't know. We didn't have kids. But our generation of kids, I don't know that they— Some have work ethics. Others— You know, it's very affluent. We've been given so much. We get lazy. We didn't have to work as hard as our parents did that went through the Depression. That really put the mark on them.

Farmer: So many people have given up farming since the 1940s. I'm wondering, did people not want to work that hard?

Kimes: Oh, definitely.

Ward: Yes. Sure.

Kimes: There's a lot of factors as to why people moved off the farms. Part of it actually was conscious social engineering. First of all, it was possible to farm larger acreages for each farmer, so that necessarily moved the latter generations off the farm. Then they needed people to work in the factories in the cities, so they needed some policies to move people off the farms and into the cities. Some of that was prosperity. Some of it was that work on the farm is brutal, especially if you've got 160 acres, and you're out in the middle of South Dakota, and you've got horses, and you're trying to get your crop to market. It's just an *unbelievable* amount of work, unbelievable to try to stay alive in that situation. The struggle is over the top. And if the prices you are getting for your crops are not good, you're screwed. In the early part of the last century there was nothing like social welfare or anything. You sank or you swam. That was it. So yes, people wanted to escape farming.

Anglo Americans at this point in time really don't understand farm work. Mexican-born immigrants are closer to their ag roots. They understand farm work so much better. It's very interesting, this whole debate about immigration in America, because the people who are immigrating to America come here to work. They don't come here to go to Disneyland, although they like to go to Disneyland. But they come here primarily to work, and send money home. That's what they do. They're adamant. They do it. They do it so intensely. They do what I call "the immigrant thing." Basically, they are insecure. I mean, that is

part of our social policy, to make them insecure. They come here and they feel insecure. They *are* insecure, in fact. Getting to work and working hard is the most expedient thing to do to ensure some security, and get that money moving back home. So they do it. And they do it really hard, and they're really set to do it.

People who might be less inclined to work don't make that difficult and dangerous journey from Mexico and south to America. It has a Social Darwinist kind of quality to it. In a certain sense, the immigration situation is perfect for selecting for people who are going to be the hardest workers, the most willing to assimilate, and really stick to it, and [be] law abiding. Because it's so damn difficult to get here, you're not going to have people who don't have some initiative coming across the border. I mean, it's very bizarre to say that, but the situation, in a Social Darwinist sense, is perfect just as it stands right now. But of course there is this whole big movement out there in America, and it's just ridiculous, because we've tried to work with the Anglo kids of the American families, and the Anglos of America, and they won't do this work. They can't do this work.

Ward: They can't do it.

Kimes: They just don't have it conceptually in their minds that you've got to get up and go to work. We tell people here, "You can't start working until seven o'clock in the morning." Well, it's difficult for us to get the Anglo kids here at eight. They're like, "You start at eight o'clock! Oh, my God. That means I've got to get out of bed at seven?" Celia gets up at three, makes lunch and breakfast for everybody in her family, and comes to work at seven o'clock.

Farmer: And she'd like to be here earlier, if you'd let her, it sounds like.

Kimes: She would if she could. Yes, she'd be here earlier. And she'd like to work later, if she could. She'd like to work ten or twelve hours a day.

This is just our perception. This is not our prejudice. We have learned this through the years, and we've observed this. Sandra and I kind of trained ourselves. Sandra and I met at work, at a job where we did piecework for the newspaper. In doing that piecework, we learned to cut out any extraneous movements, because the faster we got the product, the final product, onto the pallets to be used, the more money we made. So you didn't do anything that was extra at all. You didn't mess with it. You just got right in there and went right to work. You can make pretty good money that way. So we got that kind of training. I had worked piecework in other places, too. You learn to discipline yourself to do that.

But so many kids now are just clueless. The guys are the worst, I swear to God. I don't know why, but I think Mom is cleaning up after them all the time at home, and taking care of them. Because they're just absolutely clueless. They'll walk off and leave a big mess. Sometimes we have to tell them, "Look. We're not your mom. We're not your dad. We're not here to take care of you. This is a job, and you've got to not make a mess and you got to clean up after yourself."

Farmer: Plus, you have standards here. You have to maintain a clean workplace and be efficient.

Kimes: We do. And that's kind of a business culture that you have to instill and maintain. It can break down over time but you've got to reinforce that as you go along.

Farmer: Well, people trust you. They're putting things in their mouths that you created.

Kimes: It's a huge responsibility. It really is. So yes, it's been a real journey for us. Now, most organic farms that you find at the farmers' markets, you'll find Anglo faces, for the most part, at the farmers' markets, selling the product.

Farmer: Some— Like, Phil Foster [of Pinnacle Organic Produce] has Latino workers.

Kimes: He does. And that's starting to break through. And it's a good thing, I think. I think it's a totally positive thing.

Farmer: Are those good paying jobs, or the same pay?

Kimes: They're probably the same pay, but they're better work because it's not stoop labor. That's a change that's starting to happen. It used to be that you would find white kids working the sales end of the thing, and brown people working the production side of it. The division was strong. That's part of what Sandra talks about, is our resistance we had. We didn't want to create that. But it has naturally evolved for us in that direction, and we actually can get more done, and have a more profitable business, and pay people better if we let that [resistance] go.

Ward: Well, not everybody has a driver's license, so they can't do deliveries. Or they can't speak enough good English to speak on the phone. The more limited they are, that means they are going to be doing just the same kind of jobs. They don't have the variety. We like to get everyone doing different things: like taking the orders, cleaning, doing the soil, planting, clean-up. If you can just work your way through on a daily basis, it's not so monotonous. That's what we try to do. Because we do the same thing every day.

A Typical Day at New Natives

Farmer: Can you explain what you do every day?

Ward: The first thing we do is we get up in the morning and we put those seeds in those buckets to soak, which means we cover them with water until noon. Then we drain them, and as soon as we drain them, every one of those seeds starts growing, instantly. Then we rinse them the next day twice. But that's our first thing that we do, is we get the seeds soaking, draining and growing.

The next thing we do, is we go out there and we harvest as many rows as we need for the day. And the interesting thing about our business is that orders are fairly consistent, which is really good. Our crops are ten days, so I'm projecting what next week's orders are going to be, so I'm only going to be planting so many rows of sunflower that day because the next day they may be too old. Or the day before they are too young to cut. It's this really tight little window. I need to know this day how many we need. It would be really great to know if it was

going to hail, or if the weather was going to change and slow them down. Because they are very consistent.

Kimes: Except when the weather changes.

Ward: Except when the weather changes. Then they get set back. Anyway, so we harvest those rows. Then we take them in. Then we've got sinks set up; some of those things we need to pick the seeds off of. We don't sell any of our stuff as processed, but we like to sell it in edible form so people can just rinse it and that's it. So the sunflowers come with a lot of seeds stuck on their leaves.

Kimes: That's how we harvest them.

Ward: That's how we harvest them. So we like to put them in water so the seeds will float. We skim those off, and then still the seeds remain on the leaves and we have to pick them off. I call that our Sunflower Meditation, and on our bigger days there's four of us spending four hours picking those seeds off, four to five hours. So that's twenty-five hours, man-hours right there, that we are spending for that one day, getting those seeds off. I figured out yesterday that we actually will be cleaning four thousand buckets of sunflower next year. That's what we clean. That's four thousand buckets that have all been hand-picked.

Kimes: Forty thousand pounds hand-cleaned.

Ward: That's why I call it the Sunflower Meditation. Because if you think about it any other way it could just absolutely drive you crazy. (laughter) So then we clean them, and then we've gotten our orders together from all of our different

accounts—be they farmers' markets or our wholesale accounts, or individual stores, or individual juice clubs. We get all those orders together, and then we start packing them and putting them in place in the cooler.

As soon as we finish packing, which is usually around 12:30, 1:00, it's pretty much like clockwork. We've done it. We've got it all worked out. By 12:30 or 1:00, somebody's written all those invoices out, they've loaded a truck, and off they go to deliver it—maybe it's San Jose, maybe it's Watsonville. Maybe it's over to Monterey, or to the stores in Santa Cruz. Maybe there're two trucks going out a day. While they're delivering, some of us stay behind, and we clean up what we've been doing in the morning. All of that gets all cleaned up.

Then the other part of us will go out and we'll start bringing up the soil of everything that we harvested, all the rows. There may be as many as twenty or thirty rows. We'll bring that up with a wheelbarrow and a scoop, and take it out and put it on our soil and then bring fresh soil in, rake it out. Then a certain amount of rows will all be planted, and everything will be watered and covered, and then there's clean-up there.

We do that every day. That's what we do. It looks the same. Except for the weekends, when somebody will just come in and do the seeds—that means soaking them and rinsing them. They'll plant. We've already done the soil for them, so they don't have to do that. They'll plant and water, call it good. Then the other thing that we do is we have to go in there and hand-label all our packaging, and get all the numbers up, and get everything in order.

Farmer: Is Saturday the only farmers' market you do yourselves, or do you do others?

Educating Eaters

Ward: No, actually we're not doing as many this year. We'll only be doing about seven markets this year. I always do Wednesdays. Kenny does Saturdays. I join them on Saturday. Our other markets, our employees go to. That's really good, because that way they get direct communication with our customers. They need to educate. The other thing is, not only is it hard work, but we have to educate, because it's all new food. People look at it and they go, "What is it? What do I do with it? What does it taste like?" So it's all education.

Farmer: What about the mushrooms [that you sell at the farmers' market]? Where do they come from?

Ward: The mushrooms come from another farm. We've always sold mushrooms at the farmers' markets along with the sprouts. In fact, we started at the farmers' market with the mushrooms, although we were growing [sprouts]. It was the owner's suggestion that we sell his mushrooms at the market. We knew him. He was our landlord. We've had this symbiotic relationship. His business is very similar to ours, in the way that you harvest every day. It's as intensive. You grow all year long like we do. The operations are very similar, so they fit together. Same thing.

Farmer: Do you like everything that you sell? Do you eat it yourself?

Ward: Yes! I still have a chip about not growing the alfalfa and clover and stuff because they're very nutritious. They're very good. And there's lots of education, even more now from all the erroneous information that's been passed out, that needs to be told.

Farmer: I like that on your website you describe each type of sprout, and what the nutritional value is. That's really helpful.

Ward: Yes. That's just a start. The testing is really not there. That's just a beginning.

Kimes: I always remind people, you can only get the research you pay for. It's not like everything has been researched. People will assume that if there's something they haven't heard, then they'll think, well, it must not be true. And it's like, no, that's not necessarily true, but nobody has done the research to find it out. Around the nutrition of organic farming or organic products, the research in so many ways hasn't been done. Or it's anecdotal, or different things like that.

Ward: Well, the story that points to that is alfalfa again. There was research done in the early eighties with alfalfa seed. Bruce Ames, researcher at Berkeley, that's what he does for his research: "Maximum potential." He fed all of these mice massive amounts of alfalfa *seed*. We're not even talking about organic seed versus conventional seed, which has a lot of chemicals on it. The mice developed all kinds of cancers, tumors and stuff, eating the seed. But the research later got translated to alfalfa *sprouts*. It has always been related to alfalfa sprouts. For twenty-five years I've been trying to defend these poor little alfalfa sprouts,

because they get beat up all the time. That body of work has been passed through and through, and spoken like it's really scientific. And it wasn't even sprouts. It was seeds, which deer will not even eat, because there is a compound on them that repels them. That's just a natural thing.

So no good press on sprouts ever. Except when they do a little research on broccoli, for cancer, and they do the broccoli sprouts. That's the first positive thing on any sprouts, the broccoli.

Kimes: Well, there's other research that suggests positive things, but it doesn't have the same kind of push behind it. Because the broccoli thing got patented.

Ward: Yes, that was part of the marketing, too. But that was black and white. When the broccoli seed research came out pro sprouts, everybody wanted broccoli sprouts. Everybody still does, as if it's the only sprout that is worth anything. You never got the concept. You guys have missed the concept, that when you sprout anything— Like wheat, for instance. The vitamin C content in wheat multiplies three hundred times when you sprout it. Same with broccoli. It gets magnified. It's the same thing with all sprouts. That's why we're eating these babies. (laughter) Nobody gets it. They don't put it together.

Challenges of Distribution

Kimes: So going back to our growing situation here, there is something people need to understand about growing and farming fresh produce. This came up, and I got clear about this from talking to a friend of ours. He has a business of buying and selling products, on a worldwide scale, actually, lots of volume. He

buys finished products, warehouses them, and sells them through his retail stores. We were talking one day, because he's taken an interest in farming. And he says, "Well, the problem with such-and-such farmer (because he has an interest in small farms and so he was talking about a large farmer) is that he's harvesting before he's even got that product sold. So his product sits in the warehouse and doesn't go out and it's not fresh." (Because he was looking at the CSA of the small farmer, relative to this large farm.)

The problem with farming is that you're trying to deal in a fresh product. You get up in the morning and you start harvesting, because if you don't, you won't get your harvesting done. You necessarily have to start harvesting before you have this product sold. So the cycle is that you harvest in the morning. You prep and prepare. You put it on a truck in the afternoon; it travels to the wholesale market and ideally it's on the shelf the next morning after that. Which is the best anybody can hope to do. When you are dealing with a fresh, perishable product, you've got huge inventory issues about management of harvest and sales. In some of the larger farms in Salinas, they actually are harvesting and packing and putting produce on trucks, and putting it on the road before they have it sold, because they have such a machine in motion to get this product out the door, that if they can't find buyers for it, and they'll go ahead and load the truck and send it across the country. They'll find buyers as they travel across the country. So that is one of the difficulties of what farmers do in the fresh part of the farming business, is dealing with trying to keep the product fresh, trying to harvest it and get it to the market fresh. It's huge. It's really huge.

Ward: Yes, you don't have a lot of time to sit on it. You can't bargain.

Kimes: Nothing stays on the shelf. It's a difficult thing to accomplish.

Farmer: Most of your customers are fairly local?

Ward: Yes, and it's really good that they are so consistent, I have to say. If it wasn't that way, I just don't think that we could operate sanely. But it's because it's so consistent. They'll call in and give us an order every morning, a number of them. They're fairly consistent. There're really very few surprises. It works out beautifully. Sometimes we'll lose a really good account, for whatever reason. Then the next week somebody will call and fill it in. It's just really graceful that way. It's been very nice that way. Of course, we'll lose a few nights' sleep or whatever. (laughter) But it just kind of happens. It's great. It's happened that way all these years.

Kimes: Yes. You do have to pay attention, obviously. You do have to be real persistent, and persevere. And you got to be really on it. It's tough. You got to be on the production end of it, first of all. Of course you can't sell the produce if you don't deal with the marketing end, but the production end is just as important. We focus just about evenly between marketing and production, I think.

Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF)

Farmer: I wanted to ask about your association with CAFF, the Community Alliance with Family Farmers. Are you on that board now?

Kimes: Yes.

Farmer: What does that work consist of?

Kimes: What CAFF tries to do is to make a connection between the small family farm and the urban consumer. As the urban areas grow, it's becoming that much more important. The link is becoming, in some ways less secure, and in some ways more secure. It ties into all kinds of issues, like food security. They have a real problem with that in poor, urban areas of the country. We lived in a downtown in Riverside [California] that for a while didn't have a supermarket. You had to travel. You had to get in a car or a bus to go to a supermarket. It was kind of a poor neighborhood, and it was ethnic, and it wouldn't support the big superstores. There just wasn't the footprint there for them, or the people, I guess. I'm not sure why they weren't there. For a long time they would come and go every six weeks, and the city actually gave them a building to be in. But they would just come and go. So those poor folks in urban centers end up buying their groceries at convenience stores, which costs them more money, and it's not fresh. And they can't buy fresh produce. That's the food security issue. Those distribution chains can fall apart.

So CAFF deals partly in that, and then partly in things like farmers' markets and encouraging things like CSAs [community supported agriculture]. CAFF has always tried to work with organic growers and conventional growers. It's a struggle, because we don't have a lot of money to work with. Everybody works real hard for low pay. But we fill, I think, a really important niche. If we could find a way to attract the urban membership to CAFF, then we could really take off. We could be a really important link. Because all the people that are buying

from CSAs, farmers' markets, and natural food stores are natural constituents for CAFF.

What we're trying to represent is the family farmers versus the really large farms—if there is a "versus" in this whole thing. CAFF will take the same side as the urban consumer in various farm issues, whereas the large farm organizations will be on the other side of an issue. I can't think of any really good examples off the top of my head, but let's say, pesticide use and enhancing the natural environment. Well, CAFF will always come down on the side of reduced use of chemicals *and* enhancing the natural environment, whereas the large farm organizations, they don't want to know about that. They'll fight that tooth and nail. So CAFF will oppose the introduction of genetically altered crops, and the large farm organizations will promote that. Philosophically, we're a whole group of farmers that are aligned with the urban consumer that has concerns about where their food comes from and how it's grown. But people don't know we exist, and it's pretty hard to get that message out and get those dollars coming back in.

Farmer: Now that's the Buy Fresh, Buy Local program?

Kimes: Buy Fresh, Buy Local is a manifestation of that, yes.[11]

Farmer: Is it true that that's all over the country?

Kimes: In various spots, yes. There're seven different places. That was funded by a visionary organization. I can never keep track of where exactly the money came from for that, but they conceived of the whole thing, found some serious money

to make it happen, and supplied some seed money to get the whole thing going. That's about farmers' markets. It's about the whole concept of buying fresh, because you're buying local so it's fresher. It hasn't traveled. It kind of reinforces that idea. It really has caught on. It hasn't been very long, either. That also addresses getting fresh local food into the schools, salad bars and things like that, as opposed to junk food for the kids. You're getting fresh fruit and vegetables and salads and things like that. They've done some work, and kids love salad bars. They really do when they have access to them.

Ward: They like the sprouts.

Kimes: They like that whole concept. They like the fresh food. If you prep it and present it well, they really enjoy it, and good for them! So CAFF has worked on all those kinds of things, and CAFF has been ahead of the curve on a bunch of stuff, and hardly ever gets credit for doing that work. And darn. (laughs)

Ward: And they also provide education for conventional growers to show them how to reduce— I mean, they really reach out there.

Kimes: They have. They did a big thing they called their BIOS project, Biologically Integrated Orchard Systems.

Farmer: Not organic.

Kimes: I don't think so. They weren't emphasizing that. But anyway, they showed almond producers every way that they could possibly reduce their pesticide use, and the almond growers adopted it, and now they run it as their

own program. But they didn't give CAFF credit for it in the process. It's been like that for CAFF through the years. They came out of an organization that sued the University of California because they noticed that the University of California was doing all its research for large farms and nothing for small farms. They won the lawsuit. They got some seed money, and they were called something else at that time. [The political roots of] CAFF came out of that.[12]

Ward: Maybe somebody could do that again.

Kimes: (laughter) Maybe so. Yes, especially around this GMO thing. I mean, cripes almighty, come on! It's gotten *more* blatant. Somebody just basically bought the research out of the genetically engineered labs in Berkeley. They just said, well, here's a hundred million bucks, and we want half of all the dollars that are generated out of this research, patents and everything else. It's gotten even more blatant.

I feel good about being involved with CAFF. They are a great bunch of people. They are trying to do a very important thing. But they don't have the support that they should have. Somehow it's really difficult to connect with those urban consumers and convince them that we need their help to sustain us and stay alive.

I think the farms appreciate what CAFF does but it's hard to know where to charge for it. Plus the whole culture of CAFF is to do this stuff, give it away, because it's the right thing to do. It's like, come on you guys. It's hard. Most of these guys who do CSAs and farmers' markets are those early adopter,

libertarian types. (laughter) We're trying to work with a bunch of idiosyncratic libertarians, I guess. I don't know how to say it. They're good folks. Totally wonderful.

E. coli and Leafy Greens

Ward: Let's talk about food safety. Because CAFF is involved in that.

Kimes: Yes, CAFF is involved with that. That's a real problem, because it mostly came out of these outbreaks that have been associated with lettuce, and so forth. And the majority of those outbreaks, as I understand it, are connected to this processed product, the bagged salad, which are deemed ready to eat for having been processed.

Farmer: They tell you, you don't have to wash it, right on the bag.

Kimes: You don't have to wash it. Open it up and put it right in the bowl. So that's the standard they've set for themselves as processors, that they can do that. They've had some outbreaks along the lines. There've been some outbreaks with green onions and cantaloupes. Mostly the outbreaks are connected to meat, but hardly anybody knows that, because it just doesn't garner the same kind of attention, for whatever reason.

This last spinach outbreak got a lot of media attention. It came at a slow news time, or something like that. It just seemed to snowball. And it was nominally connected to organics, so that kind of fed that bit too. Because "conventional food actually can't be dangerous for you, but organic farmers use poop." Well,

there's a bunch of problems with that set of assumptions right there, and that is that organic farmers *don't* use poop to the same extent, by any stretch, that conventional farmers do. Conventional farmers use poop without any regulation at all. So who is using the poop in the world? (laughs) It's the conventional farmers. There's a guy named Dennis Avery who promotes this idea that organic food is dangerous. He wrote a book called *Saving the World with Pesticides and Plastic.*[13] He's managed to get attention because of the way the media works these days.

So anyway, then we have the outbreak. And there's a lot of attention. People are freaking out. There were forty thousand news stories on this one incident. That's what we do know. But we also know that there're lots of people who die eating meat and they don't get anything. This is the current atmosphere in which all of this is being played out.

It's very clever to include the handlers, because then the handlers have to enforce it onto the growers. A handler is someone who is not actually growing. So the handlers agree to the marketing agreement, and then the handlers agree to say to the growers, "You will follow these good agricultural practices that we have lined out here, and they include things like testing water. You will follow these things or we will not buy your produce." So anybody selling to those guys now suddenly finds themselves in this food-safety regime that they haven't necessarily dealt with before. (Or they might have, depending on who they were growing and selling for.) But it's required now and it's mandatory. And it's not a terrible program.[14]

Ward: It's not set yet, is it? It [the leafy greens marketing agreement] can change willy-nilly. We don't know what it is.

Kimes: It's published, but it's not cast in stone. There's a bunch of things that [still need to be resolved.] As time goes on they can change it, because the guidelines are determined by the advisory board of the marketing agreement. The marketing agreement is enforced by the California Department of Agriculture in conjunction with the advisory commission. It's complicated. It goes way back to all kinds of— Like, 1937 is when they first started these kinds of marketing agreements. So this board is made up of large handlers, with almost no input from any small producers at all, one consumer representative. And as far as I can tell, no small farmers are on this board at all, or had anything to do with putting this together, even though they claimed to have notified every leafy green farmer in the state. We figure they got maybe twenty-five percent at the most, and seventy-five percent were left out.

All that's okay to a point, because right now it's a marketing agreement, so you have to sign the agreement to actually be bound by it. But they're talking about making it into a marketing order, which means that if the producers that produce sixty percent of the product vote for the marketing order, it passes. It's not democratic in the sense of one producer, one vote. It's who controls the most product. It's easy to point to about half a dozen handlers who control about ninety percent of the product in California, so if they go to a marketing agreement, it will pass.

The problem with that is, and why CAFF is involved, is that so much of what they want to have happen around their good agricultural practices are not scientifically verified as being important. They just seem important, and certain people decided that they were. And they run counter to the values of enhancing the natural environment, and producing food without chemicals. So you get a lot of natural habitat that gets torn out. You get a lot of chemical use. You get a lot of chlorine use. And you get a lot of product that's essentially pasteurized. You get a really complex system of food safety practices that takes a fairly sophisticated farmer and staff to implement. So when you come then to a small farm who is growing for a CSA— maybe it's two people such as Sandra and myself, and they've got three acres or something like that—trying to lay this whole food-safety regime on top of them is going to do them in. They're just not going to be able to cope with it. Then what you get is what I call involuntary non-compliance. They didn't purposely not comply with these caps. They just can't comply with these caps, because they are just so beyond what they're capable of keeping up with.

Over time, I think farms can incorporate this. But there is a huge cultural problem. There is a culture clash. The way I illustrate that is that we've been inspected by the FDA probably a half a dozen times now. The FDA is intimidating because they have police powers and everything else. They are very serious people when they inspect your farm, for the most part.

Farmer: Do they do surprise inspections?

Ward: Oh, always. Always, always, always.

Kimes: You never know when they are going to drive down the driveway. And they will take up a day or two in the process of doing it. You have to drop everything and spend all your time with them. You can't do anything else when they're here. And they do it totally out of the blue. So it just totally messes everything up.

The first FDA inspector we had in here told us during the course of the inspection that she never lets her kids eat fresh produce or fresh fruit unless it has been parboiled and peeled first; they never eat at a salad bar; and they generally don't eat fresh produce at all because she considers it unsafe. This is the person who shows up with the police powers to inspect a small farm who is trying to enhance all those values of: natural environment, eating fresh foods, a good variety in your diet, harvesting things when they're ripe and ready to eat, and all those kinds of values that a big segment of us have come to embrace. But this person has the police powers that run— And her basic personal philosophy runs counter to all those values. She told us that, and then we said, "It's time for lunch. We have to eat lunch." And we were determined we were not going to feed this person.

Ward: Well, I would have invited her. I knew she wouldn't eat it. I would have totally invited her.

Kimes: And then she says, "Okay. Well, where's the nearest McDonald's so I can go eat?"

Farmer: Whoa!

Kimes: And it's just like, there is no— We are not communicating, really, across that barrier.

Farmer: A major disconnect, yes.

Kimes: So the culture clash, when this regulatory environment comes into being through this order, the culture clash is going to be huge. People are going to be stunned. They're going to be blown out of the water. They're going to throw up their hands, the farmers. They're going to be stunned.

Ward: Farmers can, I'm sure, smell that something is afoot.

Kimes: Well, they may, or they may get totally caught by surprise. So CAFF looked at this whole thing that's coming down. There're these bills in the California legislature that are also very Draconian in terms of the whole food safety thing. I mean, they are just like [whistles] ugly. They want to take it away from the ag department, and move it to the California Health and Safety Department.

Ward: We know *these* people! (laughter)

Kimes: I mean, talk about a culture gap. Wow! It's going to be huge. So CAFF is noticing this, and CAFF tries to work with the smallest of the small farmers. The experience that Sandra and I bring to it is that when our first FDA inspection happened we were completely blown away. This woman came in and inspected us as if we were a slaughterhouse, or a meat-packing facility, or a food-producing factory, rather than a farm. She inspected us with all those same

standards. And it was just like, what are you talking about? It was like a person from another planet. Or we were another planet, as far as she was concerned. It was so bizarre.

Ward: Right. Or when Homeland Security came down. Now, this is the same organization that says that they need money for inspectors. I have to say that. As soon as Homeland Security, here comes the FDA. They want to know (now, we've got six employees) they want to know where our security gate is. They want to know where our security lights are. (laughter) It's like, here we are. Six employees. This is it. And they want all of this stuff done for our farm. Then the last time they came here, again here's the organization that has no money for inspectors, I said, "So tell me. How many farms *do* you inspect?" "Well, we've been to a mushroom farm." "So we're the only farm that you inspect." We're special. I know we're special, aren't we? We're *it*. (laughter)

Kimes: Well, they have us on their dangerous foods list. But the important part of this is that we've been down this road and been totally stressed out by it. You can't believe the level of stress it adds to your life, because as a farmer you're thinking, I'm producing great food for people, and I'm feeding people and nourishing people. You're trying to build up your soil and different things like that. And here come these people who say, "You're dangerous. Prove to me that you're *not* dangerous." That's the assumption. That's the beginning assumption, that this food is guilty of danger to the public until you prove to me that it's not. That's where they come from.

Ward: Right. And even before you can have a chance to prove that it's not, you have a story in the papers, in many papers, instantly. Even if you do prove it, that same story probably will continue to run. We've seen that too. This is not just imagination speaking. (laughter)

Kimes: So CAFF has hired a full-time person to try to deal with this issue on both the legislative and political side (because that's where most of the action is right now, is on the political and legislative side), to help inform the consumer out there that this is coming down on small farms, and try to shape the message so that small farms aren't indicted prior to any kind of real— If a marketing order comes down it will apply to anyone selling leafy greens in the state. And the two- and three- and four-acre farms that are doing CSAs and farmers' markets are going to be blown away.

Ward: I could see it so easily shaping itself to say that anyone who is not using chemicals or sterilizers or whatever, is being irresponsible.

Kimes: Oh, totally.

Ward: So that's their caveat way to really get rid of this irritant organic farmer and what these consumers think they want.

Kimes: The Florida bill has a provision in there that if you want to grow leafy greens you have to get a license from the health department.

Ward: Kenny and I have actually been waiting for this to happen for ten years, the reason being that when we went to that first meeting and they were saying

all the really bad things about sprouts, we were saying, "Well, what's the difference between growing sprouts and growing chard?" And they said, "Nothing. We're just not there yet." We go, "Okay. Brace yourself." I'm actually kind of surprised it took them so long. This is ten years. I was expecting five.

Kimes: Well, Sandra is Cassandra. And you know the legend of Cassandra, right?

Ward: Yes, I have been expecting this for a while.

Kimes: We have been talking about this for a long time, and people are like, "Yes, okay. It sounds really bad." But now they are like, "Holy Tamole! Now I understand what you guys have been talking about." I was just talking to a kid today from CAFF, one of their employees, and they're trying to work up a program. He was telling me some things, and I was like, "God, you finally got it. It's great. You finally understand." We were zeroing in on the issue that the product is guilty until proven innocent, and that's becoming the starting point for all of this food safety stuff. You are producing dangerous food because it's produced outside in a field with the natural environment, and you've got to prove to me that you are guaranteeing the safety of this food when it comes to the consumer. That's the starting point for the whole thing.

Ward: It just paralyzes you. It totally paralyzed us. It really did. It probably took Kenny and I about three or four years to recuperate. Because not only were we getting harassed, I mean, they were coming down the driveway. The FDA was

coming and visiting us. Everybody who was growing sprouts was getting taken out with no evidence. Really bad.

Kimes: Oh, just all kinds of crazy things.

Ward: Just all kinds of crazy stuff.

Kimes: Our friend up in Arcata, it drove him so nuts. He just had so much anxiety he had to give up. He had a fine business that was going right along, no problems. But it gave him so many sleepless nights he just quit.

Ward: So that's what the farmers are under now. You cannot function doing this.

Kimes: Another friend of ours in Petaluma, they were growing sprouts, and they did the entire bit. They did the hand-soaked plants, the chlorine soaks and everything. They had a test come back from a lab that turned out to be false. It said their product tested positive for *E. coli O157:H7,* but it turned out that every single test that came out of the lab that day or those days was showing false positives. Well, their plan said that if that happened they had to recall everything out of the facility. So they followed their plan, like good people do when they are trying to be conscientious. They called the FDA and they called the California Health Services and they said, "We're doing a recall because we have a test that came back positive." So those people blew into their situation with their police powers, and they were never able to get back into business. There was no problem there. There was one test.

Ward: And all of those agencies got that corrected test.

Kimes: Yes. They couldn't get back in business.

Farmer: They don't print the stories that correct it, or they print it on the inside somewhere where people don't see it.

Ward: Right. And it really doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if it's actually correct or not. The important thing is what impact the story will have, and will it work to our advantage? They were like, we're not only going to put it out once, we're going to put it out over and over again. I've seen that so many times.

Kimes: And if you do have a recall, all the stores charge you for the recall. They send you bills.

Ward: Then you open yourself up for lawsuits. It's like, recall. Me. Who wants to sue?

Kimes: Yes, so if anybody had a little problem with diarrhea that day they can say, "Oh, I ate sprouts."

Ward: And anybody who knows anything about lawsuits knows that all you have to do is sue. You don't have to go to court. There will be no court. What you will do, is you will do a settlement. There will be no evidence that will be heard. All you have to do is sue someone.

Farmer: They don't have to prove that it came from a certain farm.

Ward: Oh, no. They couldn't do that anyway. They don't have that kind of science anyway. There's no science backing that.

Kimes: They don't have to prove the illness. The burden of proof is not high, because all this stuff goes to settlement. It never goes to court. You just get in there, and right away the lawyers try to settle it as fast as they possibly can, because that's their objective. They sit there and they go, "How much do you want?" And you go "I'll take ten thousand bucks." "Okay. I'll give you five." "Seven fifty." "Okay."

Ward: And you go, "Can't we take this to court?" They go, "No. You can't afford it. You have to settle." "But this is so wrong."

Kimes: So that's the legal side of the issue. Then there's the regulatory side of the issue. And where the two meet, is when you get into the issue of malfeasance or negligence. In the case of Odwalla, the justice department tried to prove negligence. It was originally going to charge them with murder, the first time in history of America that a corporation has been charged with murder, but they were going to try to charge them all with murder because they thought they had a case of negligence there. So if you as a farmer haven't done all the due diligence that you understand that you should do, and someone comes up sick, you are also subjecting yourself not just to civil lawsuits, but also criminal prosecution. You can be on trial for friggin' murder! It's just nuts. I don't know why anybody stays in business at this point.

Ward: That's what lawyers say to you.

Kimes: But here's the really tricky part, is pretty much all of this is within the borders of the United States, all these jurisdictional issues and all of these lawsuit issues. But food coming from China, I mean, come on.

Farmer: Well, there's the animal feed now. They're starting to look at that.[15]

Kimes: I know, but is anybody going to be really held responsible, or is anybody going to get sued and pay a settlement? Or, things coming from Mexico. The same bit, you know. We would do better if we moved south of the border and imported the food. It would be less stressful. We would have less exposure to criminal litigation.

So that's the issue that CAFF is trying to address for the small farmer, which is so hard. We're going to try to help them survive through this whole thing that's coming down, but wow, they don't even realize that they need our help. That sounds a little condescending and patronizing to say, but I know that they need our help. Trying to get there ahead of the regulators and convince them that they need our help is going to be a task. Figuring out how to hold the regulators off until we can work with these people, and then getting some money to educate folks and bring them along, is also going to be difficult. It's a difficult piece to pull together.

Ward: Well, you don't have to worry about having nothing to do in your retirement.

Farmer: (laughter)

Kimes: I know. Oh God. So that's the newest bit. We're calling it the leafy green issue. It's just wild. It really is.

Ward: Food is really basic, and food security is you want food in your backyard. I think it is moving to the point where it is almost impossible for us to have our simple necessities—you know, the water, the food, the air.

Kimes: It's so wild. And Americans— If you really look at the risk statistics, you are so much more in danger of being struck by lightning than you are by dying from eating spinach.

Ward: Or getting hit by a car driven by someone on a cell phone. That's what I call risk. (laughter) If I go out there, I have at least five near deaths every day. There's definitely an agenda. It's not going away.

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[1] See the oral history with Jerry and Jean Thomas in this series.

[2] See the oral history with Barney Bricmont in this series.

[3] See the oral history with Russel and Karen Wolter in this series.

[4] See the excerpt of an oral history with Nick Pasqual reprinted in this series.

[5] See the oral history with Janet Brians in this series.

[6] See the oral history with Mark Lipson in this series.

[7] See the oral history by Maya Hegege and Randall Jarrell, *The Early History of UCSC's Farm and Garden* (Regional History Project, University Library, UC Santa Cruz, 2003). http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/farmgarden.html

[8] See the oral history with Heidi Skolnik in this series.

[9] "On October 31, 1996, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced that Odwalla was recalling all of the company's juice products that contained unpasteurized apple juice. The recall

was initiated in response to 13 reported cases of *E. coli* illness that had been linked to the company's unpasteurized apple juice by the Seattle-King County Department of Public Health. During the course of the public health investigation into the outbreak, a genetically indistinguishable strain of *E. coli* that had been isolated from case-patients was found in a bottle of unpasteurized Odwalla apple juice. Although subsequent investigation by federal and state agencies was unable to pinpoint the exact source of the *E. coli* bacteria at Odwalla's Dinuba, California plant, investigators from FDA did find numerous violations of health and safety codes at the Odwalla manufacturing plant, including lack of proper sanitizing procedures and poor employee hygiene. The FDA also found that the plant accepted decayed fruit from suppliers. The investigation was ultimately expanded to include inspection of apple orchards, produce suppliers, and packing houses that furnished the central California plant with the apples. None were implicated as the source of the contaminated produce. When the outbreak was over, one child was dead from complications arising from her *E. coli* infection, and more than 65 individuals were confirmed infected with the bacteria in the western U.S. and British Columbia. As a direct result of the outbreak, Odwalla began pasteurizing its juices. In 1998, Odwalla was indicted and held criminally liable for the 1996 *E. coli* outbreak. The company plead guilty to 16 federal criminal charges and agreed to pay a $1.5 million fine." http://www.marlerclark.com/case_news/view/odwalla-e-coli-outbreak-western-states/

[10] See the oral history with Jeff Larkey of Route One Farms in this series.

[11] See the oral history with Tim Galarneau in this series for more about this program.

[12] In 1979 California Rural Legal Assistance, an advocacy group, filed a lawsuit on behalf of the California Agrarian Action Project (CAPP), founded in Yolo County, California, and seventeen farm workers, "charging that the University of California and its Board of Regents violated state law by spending tax dollars to benefit private interests [and that] mechanization research is counter to federal land grant acts [which] require federally supported research in agriculture to benefit small farmers and laborers, not agribusiness. Mechanization, it alleges, drives the small farmer out of business and displaces thousands of farm workers." See Marjorie Sun, "Weighing the Social Costs of Innovation: A Lawsuit Against the University of California Challenges Farm Mechanization Research and Its Consequences," *Science*, Vol. 223. (30 March 1984) pp. 1368-1369. This became known as the Research Priorities (or "Tomato Harvester" or "Mechanization") Lawsuit. The Superior Court of Alameda County awarded in favor of CAPP and the farm workers and declared the University of California in violation of the Hatch Act of 1887. (Superior Court of Alameda County, No. 516427-5, Raymond L. Marsh, Judge.) The Hatch Act is administered by the Department of Agriculture, which makes grants to state agricultural experiment stations to carry out agricultural research. However, the University of California appealed and on May 25, 1989 the Court of Appeals overturned the lower court's decision, finding that UC "was not required to establish an administrative process to ensure that Hatch Act funds for agricultural research were expended so as to give primary consideration to the small family farmer." (210 Cl. App. 3d 1245; 258 *Cal. Rptr*. 769; 1989 Cal. App.) CAPP filed an appeal to the Supreme Court but it was denied for review. See the oral history in this series with Sean Swezey for more on the history of CAFF.

[13] Dennis Avery, *Saving the Planet With Pesticides and Plastic: The Environmental Triumph of High-Yield Farming* (Hudson Institute, 2000).

[14] See the oral history in this series with Jo Ann Baumgartner and Sam Earnshaw for more on the Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement.

[15] Farmer is referring to the pet food made with wheat gluten imported from China that was tainted with the toxic chemical melamine that either sickened or killed thousands of pets in the United States in 2007, at the time this interview was conducted.