Bob Scowcroft

Photo by Tana Butler

Executive Director, Organic Farming Research Foundation

If there is one individual who most inspired us to undertake this historical project about sustainable agriculture, it would be Bob Scowcroft, currently the executive director of the Organic Farming Research Foundation. In 2005, as we were beginning to explore the roots of this movement, we came across the transcript of a speech that Scowcroft had recently made at the Ecological Farming Conference (Eco-Farm). Scowcroft challenged the audience:

> *One can't focus on the future until one has a solid grasp of the past. One of our collective failures has been the lack of attention paid to our written and oral history. Only two or three of the participants in the "Asilomar Declaration" [a statement in support of*

sustainable agriculture that was drafted at a three-day congress immediately before the 1990 Eco-Farm Conference and ratified by the 800 individuals who attended that conference] discussion are here today. Several have passed away. Others have left the sustainable-agriculture universe. Who has collected their papers? Where is the Center for Organic [Farming] History Research? Who is collecting the oral histories of these and many other important attendees?

Who is Bob Scowcroft? we wondered, and the rest is history, or rather the documentation of history.

An activist, Bob Scowcroft first joined the environmental movement to work on the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in the early 1970s, and later became a national organizer on pesticide issues for Friends of the Earth (FOE). As organizer for FOE, he set up a table at the Natural Foods Merchandiser Trade Show, advocating a ban on Agent Orange because of the drift of that herbicide onto nearby farms. Barney Bricmont (also the subject of an oral history in this series) and two other organizers from the California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) paid a visit to his table, and introduced Scowcroft to the organic farming movement. Scowcroft soon became the first professional environmentalist to attend and present at the Ecological Farming conference, then held at a muddy church camp in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Scowcroft moved from the Bay Area to Santa Cruz, and in 1987 was hired as executive director for CCOF. He led that organization through tremendous expansion during the exponential growth of the organic industry over the next few years. In 1992, Scowcroft left CCOF to found and direct a spin-off organization, the Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF), whose goals are to "sponsor research related to organic farming practices, to disseminate research results to organic farmers and to growers interested in adopting organic production systems, and to educate the public and decision-makers about organic farming issues." He has served as executive director of OFRF for the past seventeen years.

In 2006, the Ecological Farming Association awarded Scowcroft the prestigious "Sustie" award for lifetime achievements in sustainable agriculture. He has been engaged in nearly every political development in the national organic and sustainable agriculture movement in the past twenty years—from the controversy over the contamination of apples with the pesticide Alar in the late 1980s, to the fight to pass the California Organic Foods Act of 1990, to battles over federal standards for organic certification in the 1990s, to recent lobbying efforts to secure more funding for organic farming research in the Farm Bill. This in-depth oral history with Scowcroft,

conducted by Irene Reti on December 18, 2007, and January 11, 2008, at her house in Capitola, California, provides a vivid, "in-the-trenches" perspective on the history of this social movement that is transforming the agricultural and cultural landscape of the United States.

Additional Resources

Organic Farming Research Foundation: http://ofrf.org/index.html

California Certified Organic Farmers: http://www.ccof.org/

Bob Scowcroft, "New Directions for the Sustainable Agriculture Movement: A Conversation about Strategy: Notes on the Asilomar Declaration for Sustainable Agriculture," Ecological Farming Association, 2005.

Bob Scowcroft, "The Organic Conversation Begins Anew (again)," *Green Money Journal*, Winter 06/07. Vol. 15/issue 2.

Beginnings

Reti: Today is December 18th, 2007. This is Irene Reti, and I'm here with Bob Scowcroft in Capitola, California. So Bob, let's start by talking about where you were born, where you grew up, that early background.

Scowcroft: Sure. Born in Cranston, Rhode Island, in 1951. Moved with the corporation that my dad worked for to—let's see, '57 to Orange, Connecticut; early in '66 to Lancaster, Pennsylvania; in '69 I graduated from high school, barely, and my folks moved back to Connecticut and I went to college at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, with the very uninformed intent to be far away from home and start living in different parts of the country. I somewhat jokingly say that I went to college with a checkered past. At least our peers would think of the checkered past as in criminal, but rather, I was a high-school golf star.

Reti: My goodness! That's a whole different kind of green.

Scowcroft: Different checkered past. (laughter) It doesn't work for anti-war or organic activism to be a golf star. I made it to the PA High School States, but on my team I was third. There were two bigger and brighter stars than I was. I don't think we ever lost a match in three years. We were all really good. Golf was the key word in our family, and golf clubs. I wanted to go to Wake Forest, where Arnold Palmer went to school, but my grades my senior year started going down the tubes for both the discovery of dating and parties and running head on into math classes, where— Actually, I didn't actually run head on, I went over the cliff with those, and had to leave one and end up in checkbook math, which I did pass.

But got into Emory and went down there. Actually, they sent a letter of academic probation upon graduation of high school due to my failures in all the math classes, and ended up on (not necessarily proud of it for the transcripts, but) ended up on academic probation all four years at Emory, and had to get a 3.85 my last semester to graduate with a 2.1. I was under two points all four years there. School was not my forte. The "revolution," and anti-war, and the Allman Brothers and following them to listen to live music whenever possible seemed to be more important than going to school. Emory, along with many other schools in the late sixties, after occupations of buildings and very intense confrontations with police and the National Guard, waived the requirement to get a 2.0, thus keeping kids in school and avoiding the draft. And so I was kind of weasel-y that way. Rather than going underground or whatever, I stayed in school and got very poor grades, and graduated, as I said, with a 2.1 in 1973.

I was thinking about this on the way over [here]. The first time I ever heard the word "organic" was in our group house, where, for reasons totally unclear to me, we always had Lundberg organic rice because we wanted something organic, and the only thing available in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1970 and '71 was Lundberg organic rice. You know, combining that with beer and all the other excesses of college—

Reti: (laughs)

Scowcroft: —probably wasn't the most revolutionary, sustainable way to go, but I do very clearly remember having those bags always in our group house. And sometimes (chuckles) that was the only thing we had edible in the group house.

And then, upon graduation, I had a friend who was not quite fitting in anywhere. He had already taken a year off and traveled, and he convinced me that being an adventurer was a really cool thing to do. He and I and four others had traveled around the country in a VW bus when we were all eighteen and nineteen, for three months, graduated, went to see Jimi Hendrix, and then went right to Canada and traveled around the country. So I had a taste of traveling.

So upon graduation, a week later we went to New Delhi and then made our way to Afghanistan, and we went in the Hindu Kush mountain range and got some horses and rode around the Bandi Amir Valley with some caravans through the Hindu Kush for a while. Then he came back to finish school, and I stayed on, just taking buses and trucks and whatever, made my way through the Himalayas and Pakistan and in Kashmir—we rented horses in Kashmir and rode towards

the Chinese border there with a so-called guide, and then went to Nepal, and I did a trek into the Nepali side of the border, into Nepalese Tibet. So I did that for about five months. And came back, really shiftless at that point. Had a degree, didn't know what I was doing.

Reti: What was your degree in?

Scowcroft: Political science, because it was the only program that had no final paper or thesis. All you had to do was pass ten classes, and somehow, with all these poor grades, I always managed a C in my political science classes. And then the last one—I think that was the A that brought me over the line and got a degree.

Coming to Palo Alto, California

I did a house-sit and just wandered around Virginia until the next summer, where the family [said], "You gotta do something. You gotta get it together! You can't just travel." So I called a friend, and he got me a job as an Earth Shoe salesman in Palo Alto, California.

Reti: That's pretty classic. Earth Shoes—I haven't thought of those in years.

Scowcroft: You see everybody's eyes kind of roll back, you know?

Reti: Yes, yes. (laughs)

Scowcroft: "Oh, boy, that was a rough time. And they were *ugly*."

Reti: (laughs) They sure were.

Scowcroft: And I was dating, and you just— (laughter)

Reti: It conjures up a whole world.

Scowcroft: Yes, it's flashbacks. It's still the appropriate term for it.

Reti: So you came out to Palo Alto.

Scowcroft: I just drove out, knowing nobody, in my bus (I always had VW buses), and showed up at this place in Palo Alto. They were sort of expecting me. I thought I was going to be a manager immediately, get a real job. That wasn't the case. But, "Sure, you can work for a couple of bucks an hour and be a shoe salesman like everybody else and see if it sticks." So that's what I did for all of about six or seven weeks.

Some of the carpenters finishing up the store (it was in the Stanford Shopping Plaza, actually, the shopping center), these carpenters lived in a community up in the mountains, and they invited me to a party one weekend, and I basically never left the party. Had my bus in the parking lot and quit selling shoes and moved up there, and on and off lived there for four and a half more years, and did a number of other adventures from that location.

John Jeavons and Alan Chadwick

One of the better friends I made there pretty early on was a gentleman named Rip King. Rip was this number-two person in this project down at a computer company that had given some land to a guy named John Jeavons.[1] It was called "French intensive gardening," and there were these gardens, and Rip was

inventing really neat compost bins, and Jeavons and Rip had studied under this guy named Alan Chadwick, who had only made it in Santa Cruz for a couple of years before.[2] It just got too squirrel-y for him them there, and he took off to the hills. Jeavons had written this book and started this little business called Ecology Action, and Rip was sort of the assistant director. So we would go down and help out in the garden, and Jeavons would come up. Rip had built all these gardens on this community. I was part of one of the gardens about a mile away from the road. That was the first time I heard about French intensive and double-digging garden beds, and this place called UC Santa Cruz, where Chadwick's garden had stayed in place.

Reti: Did you ever come down to visit the garden?

Scowcroft: No. And eventually the community ended with fifty to seventy police evicting everybody in a very supportive and humorous and celebratory way, if that's possible. The property became the keystone of the Mid-Peninsula Open Space District Parks, which was what some of us wanted all along, and most of us stayed really good friends with each other. I went on to Hawaii [on] another adventure with another buddy of mine who had come out and stayed on the property. Earlier, another buddy and I had traveled to Alaska, and eventually we hired a plane that dropped us off above the Arctic Circle, and walked around there for a while.

Working with Friends of the Earth on the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act

And then came back, and I went to D.C. to take a break from California. I was still a resident, but for personal reasons, I needed a country between me and California. So just hanging out in D.C., and saw a brochure [put out by a group called the Alaska Coalition] that said, "Alaska needs your help," and went in and said, "Well, I'm only here for a while, so I'll stuff your envelopes. I don't need a job, want a job. But I just came from Alaska, and it was really amazing, and if I can empty wastebaskets and free up somebody who knows more than I do, so be it."

And from that, within about four weeks they said I was a really good envelope stuffer, and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act was starting, and would I be the office manager for seventy dollars a week? And about the fifth week I had met this really great woman. We danced all night. But my Afghan fellow traveler buddy then showed up and said China was open and it was time to ride across Mongolia.

Reti: (laughs)

Scowcroft: (laughs) And so it was, like okay, here we are. Here are these paths. She said, "You know, we've been going out for about a month now, and what's goin' on here? I mean, it's kind of serious." And the folks on the Hill were saying, "You're a really good envelope stuffer, and maybe we could even have you do some more organizing." And my buddy's saying, "Beijing is open, and they can't possibly find you once you get there, and so we can just get a visa for

Beijing, and then we'll just take off. What are they going to do? I mean, they'll just expel us if they catch us." I chose to stay in D.C. and postpone Mongolia and continue to date the woman. We've been married now and together thirty years.

Reti: Aw! So this was about what, '75?

Scowcroft: Early '78. So it's a little more longer-winded for your tape, but what happened there was, I was and am a really good organizer. I'm very secure in that. And within about three more months they took me off emptying the wastebaskets and gave me states to organize for the actual legislation with Mo Udall as the leader in Congress. I came up with this idea of getting outfitters—all these small, little backpack stores—to hold raffles and "Alaska Nights" with Galen Rowell's photographs and slide shows. I was generating fifty to two hundred letters per store, who would also offer to put up a backpack for a dollar raffle ticket. So I was generating mail; I was getting businessmen and women for Alaska, and getting fifty to two hundred dollars a store. Some weekends I'd be running five or ten of those.

They said, "Okay, now you're just a national organizer." Exxon and the oil companies are coming in saying, "Locking up Alaska as national parks and wilderness areas is bad for business." I was able to get a hundred and fifty business people saying, "Well, it might be bad for theirs, but it's great for ours." And Frank Church (D-Idaho) was able to say, "I got fifty letters [from stores] saying this is good for business to have more national parks, and I got one letter from this oil company saying it's bad for business because we want to drill the

daylights out of it. So I'm going to go with the businessmen in my town, and [not] these oil companies overseas, or a lobbyist here in D.C."

So I did that for a year, and then had enough of D.C. Judy's (my partner's) sister lived in Palo Alto, and I was still a Palo Alto resident. I'd stayed away longer than I intended. So we decided if we're really going to be together, we'd try another adventure, because I still hadn't let go of that. And we moved out here via Belize and Guatemala and Mexico. It took us about three months to get here.

Pesticide Activism with Friends of the Earth

And as I was leaving the D.C. office, the guy sitting next to me with a door on sawhorses doing his work on pesticides said, "Nobody really knows this, but I'm independently wealthy, and I just gave David Brower a check for $10,000 to hire you as the first national organizer of Friends of the Earth. Would you do it?" I said, "Well, if I can just show up whenever I want to, will the money be secure?" He said, "Yes, it's in a restricted account." The D.C. staff said, "But we have too many staff, Brower. We're in financial difficulties. You [Bob] just have to know that the instant that money runs out, you have to leave." I said, "Well, that's a deal. I've never had a job in advance of anything, anywhere, at any time, so the fact that I can go on an adventure and come back to a job in San Francisco is too good to be true. That's no problem."

So I went up to the city (San Francisco), and the money was there when we got there, and we got a place in Palo Alto, and the dire straits (at Friends of the Earth) were more dire and less straight, but we decided to start out with a concept called an "environmental chamber of commerce," where I would pick up

where I'd left off at the Alaska Coalition and organize outfitters and bike shops. And since this guy had been working on banning certain pesticides, I'd go to the natural food industry and see if I could get natural food stores involved, and together we'd have small businesses speaking on behalf of the environment.

They actually raised a little bit of money from foundations to support it, so already I had about fifteen thousand [dollars]. I went to this thing called the Natural Foods Merchandiser Trade Show with a little table about banning spray drift. That was my first campaign, was to ban Agent Orange and the drifting of that herbicide onto unintended farms. And three gentlemen—Stuart Fishman, and Barney Bricmont[3], and Sy Weisman—discovered what I was working on. They got me to the North Coast chapter of something called CCOF [California Certified Organic Farmers]. So I went there and saw the organic farms in Marin and Sonoma, and decided maybe I should do a little bit on behalf of organic. And so I went to this trade show and came with just a bucket. I was the only nonprofit table—you know, took the folding table down there, and came back with $3,500 in fives and tens and fifties and checks in my glass flower vase, half of my salary for the next year, because I was paid seven thousand a year and three thousand were admin and desk and phone costs. That was my salary my first year, $7,000.

So I went to the Friends of the Earth directors. Already, Brower was not in theory the director, although he kept his fingers in for so long that a lot of the issues, a lot of the problems were directly assigned to him. But it wasn't entirely him that brought [Friends of the Earth] down. So he said, "Well, okay, I guess we'll put that in a restricted account, too. We wouldn't have got that money without you.

It's really in your hands, so I guess you've got six more months of time here at seven thousand a year." And within about six months, I had ten outfitters and fifteen bike shops and three hundred natural food stores. By the time I was done, I had fourteen hundred stores on my list nationwide.

Becoming Involved in the Organic Farming Movement

So that brought me to the word "organic." That introduced me to the red-eyed, Guatemalan-shirt-wearing, giggling, laughing, organic (wink, nod) farmer-gardener, who wasn't doing that much in the form of commercial farming. But I did see Rainbow Grocery, which is where Stuart Fishman worked at the time, in San Francisco. I said, wow, there's a lot of money in this. This is a real place. And I met a few farmers that Sy Weisman introduced me to, that were kind of cranky individualists whose moms and dads told them never to put poison on the land, who had sort of always been farming this way, and now these hippies were coming and buying it for more. So they didn't like much about the hippies, but the fact that they were paying twice as much for their food than they could get anywhere else, that was okay.

The Early Ecological Farming Conferences

And then I met Warren Weber.[4] I met the Lundberg family, who were very interested in environmentalists. And I think it was either the third or fourth Eco-Farm, I was the keynote speaker and the first environmentalist to ever attend and present at the Ecological Farming conference, in La Honda.

Reti: What was that like?

Scowcroft: Muddy, cold. Elizabeth Martin invited me. They were kind of running it. California Action Network sort of had this thing going with Eco-Farm at the time. Of course, Amigo Bob Cantisano was around.[5] I lived in Palo Alto, so I didn't sleep there, because it was miserable. It was [held] in the winter at this Christian camp with bunk beds, and the hot water ran out by the first half of the first person's shower in this six-bunk bed room. Everything was damp and wet and muddy. The owners of the camp, the church—they did the food, so it was grilled cheese sandwiches and twenty gallons of Campbell's tomato soup, and there were school buses with people in them, too. It was the past meeting the present. This is in '81, '82, so many of the communities were still going on up there, and the painted buses were only eight years old, and the stoners, and the researchers, and the youngsters wannabe's.

So I had my little card table, and at the Eco-Farm conference there was a guy named Miguel Altieri on one side of me; Kate Burroughs on another; Barney Bricmont on another; and Ag Access's owner, David Katz. That was the only five tables, the so-called trade show part of Eco-Farm. We'd sit in La Honda shivering our asses off, handing out our literature or selling our books. Miguel had twenty copies at a table of *Agroecology: The Science of Sustainable Agriculture*.[6] He'd just sit there, he and his wife, shivering, trying to sell a book to make money for his program. That was really my first introduction to organic.

Beginnings of the 1980 California Organic Foods Act

Reti: How were you received as a representative of a major environmental organization?

Scowcroft: It blew me away because it was like everybody was looking up to me. And it was, like: "Me? Wait a minute! You don't know my past!" (laughter) "You should not be looking up to me, whatever you do. I'm from the alternative universe." Friends of the Earth, in part, was still part of the alternative universe. And they were like, "Wow! An *environmentalist* is here! We're so far off every grid. Nobody's ever cared, and we're farmers, and we're sustainable-ag activists. The environmental community doesn't even know we exist. They're too afraid of us to have anything to do with us. We're too small or—"

Reti: Too afraid because?

Scowcroft: Stoner, gardener, back-to-the-land—all the images that most of the major environmental groups were trying to run as far away from as they could. "Oh, no. We wear suits and ties, and we're part of the system. We compromise, and we're not off any grid. We like steak and potatoes, too. Agriculture doesn't have anything to do with the environment." With the exception of a few folks that were saying, "Do the words Agent Orange mean anything? Or 2-4-D or 2-4-5-T or DDT, spray drift, toxic chemicals in our waterways?" But that wasn't an environmental issue.

Reti: What raised your consciousness about environmental issues?

Scowcroft: There was no enlightening moment or consciousness-raising. I'm just bumping along like a pinball in the machine here, and this just seems like the natural, next thing to do. A lot of things happened at once. I was trying to fight spray drift and Agent Orange. And Sy and Stuart called me and said, "Hey,

there's this guy, Vic Fazio, and there's this two-page law in Sacramento, and it's about to go down the tubes, and we got a week. Can you write a letter on Friends of the Earth letterhead supporting an organic food act?" I said, "Friends of the Earth is wild. You can do anything you want. But I'll ask." Not really thinking about it. And the director and Brower both said, "No, it's too extreme." I mean, we're fighting nuclear power, breeder reactors, anti-war, saving whales. But organic was too radical at that point in time. It was just too much.

Reti: This is 1980.

Scowcroft: Nineteen seventy-nine, '80.

Scowcroft: Yes. "It's too much." I said, "Hey, I've been to real farms. Wait a minute!" And in a typical Friends of the Earth way, we spent as much time fighting with each other and lobbying each other. They said, "Well, okay, we'll revisit this. We have a board member whose wife does something on this. Maybe if she says it's okay, we'll let you write our support on the (FOE) letterhead." This board member was a guy named Alan Gussow, who was a visiting professor at UCSC and building these incredible poles in the garden, peace poles with his art classes. He was bringing them to this thing called the Chadwick Garden. I don't know if any of those are still up, but that is a very important early link of art and agriculture.

They were visiting professors, and Joan [Gussow] was out here. She was a professor of nutrition at Columbia [University]. So Joan gets involved. She said, "Well, let me think about this." So she wrote a four-page letter to me and Brower

saying, "I've done some research, and there's nothing that says organic is more nutritious. So you don't have to worry about saying it's better for you or safer. But, you know, if there is a law and a definition, it probably does have some environmental impacts. And if the business of organic, if the market economy of organic has a way to operate under the foundation of law, then there's sure to be collateral or secondary impacts on the use of pesticides and contamination in the water."

It was the most brilliant— If there is such a thing as a consciousness-raising moment per se, I still repeatedly refer to that letter oftentimes. Joan and I, every other time we get together, still laugh about it because she nailed the whole systems approach in one handwritten letter.

Reti: Yes, that's fascinating.

Scowcroft: You know, there was only one typewriter around. There were no computers, and so she wrote out a four-page letter on what might happen. Brower got it. I went in, and the director at the time got it and said, "Oh, okay, you can write a letter on behalf of Friends of the Earth supporting an organic food act in California." 26569.11. And a guy named Sam Farr was the assemblyman who carried it.[7] So we met Sam through this process then as well. And it passed. And lo and behold, California had the first permanent organic law. The first regulation was in '74 in Oregon. The first law was in California. And Friends of the Earth was part of that. So here were these farmers saying, "Friends of the Earth stood up for us, the only environmental group," and it was just a half-tushed effort after bumbling around with, like, three of us.

Reti: (laughter)

New Roots for Agriculture

Scowcroft: But it looked really good. So I was invited to every Eco-Farm to talk as "the leading environmentalist supporting this." And about a year later, Brower came in one day and said, "Hey, I've got this manuscript, and you're our ag guy. You read it." And it was this professor, and I got to about page ten and said, "Ptew! You know, way over *my* head. I mean, I'm a 2.1 [GPA] guy here. I have the gift of gab, and I'm a good organizer, but I can't tell you guys if—"

So there was a book publisher (Brower had one) named Bruce Coleman. Bruce sat with me and kept talking to me and Brower. They said, "Well, let's publish something in agriculture." And it was called *New Roots for Agriculture*, by Wes Jackson.[8]

Reti: Oh, I remember that book.

The USDA Study and Task Force on Organic Agriculture

Scowcroft: So there I met Wes. Actually, that was a year or two later. Before that, I was in Washington, D.C. I had helped out a guy named Garth Youngberg, who worked for the USDA. He was a professor in Illinois, and he had been tasked by [Secretary of Agriculture Robert S.] Bergland to run something called the USDA Study and Task Force on Organic Agriculture.[9] So they were going to farms, and they were looking for networks and calling me: "Hey, do you know anybody anywhere?" I said, "Well, I heard of somebody there, and there's some crazies

over there, and this farmer says there's one in Nevada and there's one in Mississippi."

So through this word-of-mouth (by many others), they got to a bunch of farms and wrote the organic task force report. That was published in the last week or two of the Carter administration. Garth was hired to actually staff an organic research desk at the USDA. I was in D.C. doing something for work, when about six months later, [President Ronald] Reagan was in, and the first big, shrink-government [idea] was to fire five hundred D.C. employees in the USDA. "This is an overgrown bureaucracy"—which it is, actually. So they chose five hundred employees, and Garth and his secretary were among the five hundred to be let go.

Then the order came down to destroy the master plates of the organic task force report, and all copies of it. Because "organic" meant "starvation." I happened to be visiting Garth in the office the day that order came down. He was freaking out, and I was, "What are we going to do?" So we batched up twenty copies in a brown paper bag, and I put them in my bags and backpacks and stuff. And at that moment thought I was smuggling out through security— You know, there was an administrative order to destroy those reports! I was breaking a law and smuggling out an American document that had been ordered destroyed out of the office. I still have two of those in my office that I kind of wave around and show.

They fired five hundred people, and then brought back four hundred and ninety-eight as outside contractors. This is the bogusness of Reagan and his history of

small government. They didn't shrink government. Maybe they shrunk them by taking them off the government insurance or something like that. But they needed the people. The only two that were permanently fired were Garth and this woman from the secretary pool who'd had the bad luck of being assigned to his desk four months before, so she was now somehow an organic—contaminated, and was fired.

So in that period of time, I had met Garth Youngberg. I had met Wes Jackson. I had been to Eco-Farm. A guy named Steve Gliessman introduced himself at Eco-Farm and invited me to speak to his class on agroecology in '81.[10] And I met Joan Gussow.

The Mediterranean Fruit Fly and other Anti-pesticide Activism

Then the medfly [Mediterranean fruit fly] hit. I kind of dropped everything and got involved with that. Friends of the Earth at that point thought it was a pretty bad idea to use DC-6s to spray eight million people at five hundred feet with malathion, and then ground-spray diazinon. So they let me talk to the press. I'd never done any media work. I'd never done a press release. And within three months I had the *New York Times* on line one, and the *Washington Post* on line two, and six other FOE staffers standing around me going, "I don't know what you've done, but you're national news. What can we do to help? Way to go! This is FOE at its best. We'll drop everything and take it as far as we can." We stopped the DC-6s. We did not stop the spraying. [Then California Governor] Jerry Brown blew it three or four different times. We spent $100 million, and the medfly comes back every year or two, twenty-five years later. But that put me

and Friends of the Earth on the national anti-pesticide—and as people then delved in a little bit, pro-organic.

Right around that time, a lot of new pesticide groups were formed. Not nearly as many exist anymore. But it's about '81 or '82— It's like, I gotta believe in reincarnation to ban every suspected carcinogen. There are eight or nine thousand chemicals out there. So we should just get off the grid and just be for organic and don't use any of those. FOE had to process that a little bit. It was kind of hard. There was still a lot of residual, and not incorrect— You know, all you need is one stoner proclaiming "herb" the greatest organic tool going, and all your lobbying and all that work is down the tubes.

The Organic Research Act

I'd had met another gentleman named Bob Rodale, who invited me to be a keynote speaker at something called the Cornucopia Project. At the Cornucopia Project in '81 they were trying to do this sustainability thing. So I gave my first big public speech there. (Eco-Farm seemed to be more just talking to buddies.) And they had this thing where they had break-out groups. The break-out groups had, like, six hundred people from Lehigh Valley, forty people from Pennsylvania, and then six of us from the West Coast who had come there.

Sego Jackson was the head of Washington Tilth. The guy from Oregon knew of Tilth, but he was the Eugene, Oregon, field staff for Jim Weaver. His name was Peter DeFazio. Garth Youngberg didn't want to go sit with six hundred people, so he came to my group, and then a woman named Sara Ebenreck. And we said— (You know, you're supposed to report back from your group.) —"We

have this Organic Task Force Report, and there's five of us, and Peter actually works for Jim Weaver." So Sego said, "Yes, the Tilths are strong in the West. They have eighty farmers." So we said, "What the hell? Let's write a law. Let's write the Organic Research Act." So we came back and reported that's what we were going to do from our group. And Peter got Weaver's aide in D.C., Kevin Lancaster, to take the lead. We wrote the Organic Research Act, using the recommendations of the organic task force report. And I went from two hundred stores to eight hundred stores, because no environmentalist had ever gone to the natural foods industry, because, talk about image problems! The image of natural foods in the eighties was take these pills and supplements, and you'd be strong and your body would build, and you'd get girlfriends and boyfriends, and you wouldn't be bald anymore. Actually, it was so surreal that Robert Altman made a movie called *Health* on the floor of the trade show in the eighties.

Reti: I'll be darned.

Scowcroft: After that movie came out, they banned press for fifteen years after that. (laughter) Because Altman did his improv, and he had these stars go to these booths and just kind of filmed them. It turned out you'd be R-rated after taking these three vitamins. I mean, all the crap. Oh, all the absurdities. But most of the booths were vitamins and health aids. The minority were food booths. So I was there. Now they let me inside, and so I sat next to a guy named Gene Kahn, who had his jams all lined up, and he called them Cascadian Farm jams.

Reti: Oh.

Scowcroft: A lot of it is just the providence of sitting next to somebody. Well, there were only ten foodies. There're these Lundbergs, and there's Gene Kahn, and there're a couple of other companies and these food stores. [In] '83 I met a guy named Peter Roy [former president of Whole Foods], who had two stores, and he was going to merge with this other guy named John Mackey [founder and CEO of Whole Foods], who had two stores, and Peter wanted to start a trade association, and I still—I just gave him a copy the other day I found in my files—we exchanged letters on me maybe being the director of either the trade association or helping him with education, because they were going to call their four stores together—they were going to call it Whole Foods Market.

It was all in this four-year period where all this happened. The Organic Research Act failed, but we generated 50,000 letters through these natural food stores. And by then, Friends of the Earth was paying me about eighteen thousand bucks. I was one of the only income producers in a fifty-person organization that was going down the tubes. Brower had signed million-dollar printing contracts, and they were in the red everywhere, and all my accounts were in the black and growing. I contributed some money to help start this thing called Pesticide Action Network, PAN, which is a world-renowned group now. I mean, I gave $500 out of my account to keep David Chatfield and Monica Moore up and running. I gave money to a guy named Jay Feldman, who was working for Rural America, to start the National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides. I was there and played a very minor role in starting that.

The Organic Research Act failed and was reintroduced in '86 as the Low-Input, Sustainable Ag program. That failed, and it was reintroduced again in '88 as the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program [SAREP], and that succeeded. That twenty-year anniversary is coming up next year. And one of our founding board members, Jill Auburn, is the director of that.[11]

Moving to Santa Cruz

So by '84, Friends of the Earth was going bankrupt, and the inter-staff conflict was so dynamic, I'd had enough. We'd just had our first child, and Gliessman thought there was some work for me. We had bought a house in Santa Cruz in '81, three of us, one of my commune buddies and Judy and I, and it was clear FOE was going down. By then, there was one other well-funded money center in the political action committee of Friends of the Earth. So I worked on the [Walter F.] Mondale campaign, on the PAC, for six months and ended up learning a lot about running a congressional campaign. It was [Thomas J.] Tom Campbell from Stanford who took the Pete McCloskey seat over there, and he was a guaranteed liberal Republican. They found a Democrat Stanford professor just to run against him. But we got up from thirty-four percent, I think, to thirty-nine percent by the day of the election. So we got our chops down pretty big. Then I moved down here, and—

Reti: Gliessman thought there was going to be work for you?

Scowcroft: Yes, and there wasn't.

Reti: At the university?

Scowcroft: Yes. I had been in his classes [as a guest speaker], and then I'd talked to the [Farm and Garden] apprentices every year. One of the support staff of Friends of the Earth, I got her to be an apprentice. She left FOE and became an apprentice down here. I was going to the Farm when I'd come down here, just to visit and watch some of the early uprisings. Like, if the guys could take their shirts off, why couldn't the women? That was a major issue for one whole apprentice year, and the university got really upset. And finally I think the guys had to wear their shirts, because the university just couldn't understand what was going on at all. I think Carol led some of that activity, our FOE staffer.

Let me just say a couple of other things.

Garth Youngberg

So in '84, you know, I'm pretty close to Garth [Youngberg], and he's now resurfaced, founding the Institute for Alternative Ag. He founded it to create a peer-reviewed publication that the grad students could use to get published, because it was all about very narrow, single-discipline research at the time. You'd come in and say, "I'm sort of a soil scientist, but actually I'm studying labor and pests in their role in building the soil," and [laughs] people were, like, "Well, you can't publish that here. There's no place for you." So Garth got the scientists that were tenured to agree to sit on a review committee, and created this publication and institute to manage it. It was the first place that any student could publish and not perish, that was juried and peer reviewed, and had the respect of at least twenty professors. It was still totally controversial in doing that. So Garth had that going. He had the institute just starting up. Gliessman

had the IFOAM [International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements] meeting at UCSC [in 1986]. Wes [Jackson] was coming out to it. *New Roots for Agriculture* had become a hit.

Meeting the Expectations of the Land

Bruce Colman, who was the editor of FOE Books until almost the end— FOE had gone down the tubes. Eventually it went bankrupt, and the name was bought in bankruptcy court (which most people don't know), and the lists, and then three environmental groups merged under that name. Bruce went off, and he introduced me to a guy named Wendell Berry. Bruce and Wendell and Gliessman and Wes put together a book called *Meeting the Expectations of the Land*, which is an incredible series of essays that Gliessman helped put together and edit that's part of this whole agroecology history.[12]

As I said, '84 was the key time. Eco-Farm had moved to Asilomar, or was about to do that. And me and Bob Rodale and Garth and Wes would always try to get together. I'd be just sitting there staring with jaw open—what am I doing in this circle? I'm not worthy. I'm not the same. I'm the sponge here to listen to— They're all older than me, ten years older. I was the kid in the candy shop listening to them all talk to each other and tell old stories.

Two other things happened then. One is in '84, I think, I was speaking to Gliessman's class, and one of the kids came up afterwards. I was always really good with interns. I had amazing interns at Friends of the Earth. And one of the students came up and—we were only a few years apart, but he asked such great

questions, I tried to get him to take a semester off and be my intern at FOE. His name was Mark Lipson.[13]

Reti: Oh!

Scowcroft: And that was the first time I met Mark, was in Gliessman's class.

The other thing was the IFOAM conference. I don't think it was '84; it might have been '85 or '6 even. But we moved down here, and we didn't know for the first few months— We had these challenges with our son. We were just kind of— well, his development is not quite happening on time. Things aren't right. Neither of us had jobs. Neither of us had insurance, and we had a house that we were making payments on, which seemed kind of cool. And I thought I might have this transitional work thing in place.

And so once we discovered this, I used some backdoor connections and immediately got a job as a secretary in the adult continuing education program up at UCSC, yellow forms and pink folders. It had nothing to do with anything I was doing, but you have to do this. It was the benefits. But they let me take a break, and I did the press for the IFOAM. So I got to hang out at that whole conference and help Steve and Wes and some of the others do press around IFOAM and meet some of the world travelers at the time. And Miguel [Altieri] came down.

So I did that, and then they also let me— They wanted to just try different things, so they let me program Wes Jackson as a continuing education program event. I think I prepared one or two other "classes" kind of in my field, and they let me

go to Eco-Farm those two winters that I was working as a secretary. It wasn't a very good fit. But it was also really good because it got us medical benefits to cover the costs associated with our child.

Becoming Executive Director of California Certified Organic Farmers [CCOF]

I had told Barney Bricmont every winter at Eco-Farm, "Some day I'll work for CCOF," and he's like, "That is never gonna happen. This is a dysfunctional group. The budget's seven thousand. They're never gonna come together." But I'd see Sy and Stuart do these different things. "And it's just not going to happen, because they never will organize themselves."

Reti: To get the money together.

Scowcroft: To get anything together, to be an actual statewide group. "It's balkanization. It's people's republics (their chapters). They don't even like each other in their own people's republic." So he just kind of keeps it together and sets up a card table at Eco-Farm, and that's that.

Then [in] '87 I saw a little ad in the paper: "CCOF looking for an executive director," and called this phone number and said, "I'd like an application." And Mark answered, "Oh, yes! Oh, I've been thinking about you. You would be great," and he sent the other person working there, Phil McGee, on his bicycle, like, thirty minutes later up to my house, put the application in the box. I went through a pretty surreal hiring process and got the job.

Reti: Surreal?

Scowcroft: Yes. Well, there was, like, six people on the interview committee, and three of them didn't really care for each other. I'm in an interview. One comes, throws his wallet open and says, "I'm a card-carrying member of the American Communist Party. Are you going to have any problem working for me?" I said, "I don't think I've ever really had an interview question like that before."

Reti: (laughs) There's the card right there.

Scowcroft: There's the card right in front of you. And he wasn't even a farmer. This was how surreal— He sold cheesecakes out of his truck. But he was the only guy that would go to a chapter meeting, so they had put him on the board.

Reti: (laughs)

Scowcroft: But there were a couple of other real farmers on the board, and Warren Weber was the kind of lead by force of will: "We're going to make this a statewide group. We're going to have real rules. We're going to enforce them, and we need an executive director that brings it all together instead of this kind of ad hoc way to go."

So, at a tumultuous meeting, where people voted against me out of the principle of, we don't want a statewide group— I mean, I'm just going to this interview. "Hey, I think I got a job, dear. You know, we got something for the kids." She'd gotten a job in daycare in town, and we were kind of scratching along. The vote is like ten to six or something. "Well, I got a job, but six people voted no because they don't even want this group to exist."

Reti: (laughs)

Scowcroft: I don't remember the exact vote, but it was the first— And, you know, the night before, people drank tons of wine. And, it was, like, okay, I think I'm going to like this, but what is going on?

Reti: "What have I signed up for here?"

Scowcroft: And then I go to my secretary job in late November, give notice. I'm supposed to start January 1, but with vacation time— I'm going in the evening just to kind of start it off, and Mark is like, "Thank God you're here. There's actually a third employee, but he's not around right now, and none of us have been paid in three months, and we don't really have any money in the bank account. We're not owed that much. And inspections are supposed to start again. And we were founded in 1974, and it's 1987, and we've never filed a tax return. And we're really glad you're here, a real professional that can help us through this. There's no money to pay anybody, but I have an idea and know somebody, and maybe we can figure out if the Grateful Dead will give us a gift." That was my first day in the office, formal day.

Reti: [Whistles.] Wow.

Scowcroft: Late '87. So the Grateful Dead gave a $10,000 gift through another 501(c)(3) and everybody's salary was caught up. In thirty-one days, we filed for our federal tax status. They'd only filed in '85 for a state tax status, and you have three years to the day to file for a federal and then file all your returns. January

31st was the third-year day. So it was '85, January 31st, somebody had filed in the state articles of incorporation.

Reti: So then you had till '88 to do the—yes, yes.

Scowcroft: Yes, and I was hired in December of '87.

Reti: Of '87. So you had a month!

Scowcroft: So I had a month.

Reti: Whew!

Scowcroft: And we did it. We filed everything, and paid a fine that I then successfully appealed and got paid back. The Dead saved us, which fulfilled just about every image that everybody was afraid of!

Reti: (laughter) Very interesting.

Scowcroft: And that's how we kicked it off in '88.

Reti: So then what were your visions, once you got over that initial crisis?

Scowcroft: Well, Warren left the presidency, and a new guy came in named Bill Brammer. By then, organic was a little bit real. There was a state law, and there were a number of farmers who were transitioning to organic by putting ten or twenty acres in, and all the two- and five-acre growers were really upset. "Wow, the big guys are coming in. They put forty acres into organic, and there's an organic farmer in Kern County that has 100 acres. This is not good! We're the

revolution. They're not." And another group was, "This is what we're all about, is everybody should be—"

So the internal debate was profoundly passionate, and remains so to this day, within CCOF. Who are we, and what do we want to be when we grow up, and how do our chapters work? No one had ever really enforced the, "Hey, here are the rules, and you've got to pay your fees." And the fees were based, like a lot of agricultural assessments, it was a half percent on the sales of certified organic. You come in, you pay a little bit of money to apply, and then you get inspected, and all these things happen for a year or two. And you're not paying any assessments, so you're drawing on the nonprofit for services without paying anything into it. You're in transition. Then you get certified, and then you go another year of sales, and then you pay.

So we had a real back-end situation, problem here. We started to get people to call for certified organic, and we were getting more farmers. We went from a hundred and eighty to three hundred the first year we were there. But even the hundred and eighty, only about ninety of them were actually farmers. The others were idealists that put their forty acres in of woods in Mendocino into organic. They weren't farming it. Or if they were, they weren't producing anything that was legally assessable. (laughs) It was a real challenge. We were always in financial—you know: "Oh, please!" Or I'd be calling, "Could you send your assessment in a little bit early?" or "Could you guesstimate?" to get that through.

But Brammer became the president, and he and I were kind of life friends from there on out. He was almost seven feet tall, very forceful. "I've been given the

mantle from Warren Weber, and we are going forward, and we're making this a statewide organization. We have rules, and it's all voluntary. None of you people have to be here. You don't have to join CCOF. But if you do, these are the rules you have to follow."

Very early on, there was a decertification around a very inspirational family who had inspired a lot of people to go organic, but just didn't believe in following the assessment rules. Why should they pay? That was a signal moment, where a couple of incredible farmers who had been farming this way since the late forties, in dissent, opposed the rules and were decertified by a very close vote. I think the record shows they left CCOF before they were decertified. But that was the signal, and some other people then left in protest with them. That took some of the visionaries and some of the peer power of the rooted history away from the group, but it also showed that we meant business. If you wanted in, you paid. And that started to raise more money.

And then in about eighteen months, two things happened to change the landscape again. One was the carrot caper.

Reti: I want to ask you about that later.

Meryl Streep Endorses Organic Food on *60 Minutes*

Scowcroft: And then the other one was a friend of mine. I still stayed in touch with a lot of the old enviros, and one called me and said, "Hey, we got this thing coming down. We're going to release this report, do a lot of media work around it. But we're starting to feel bad about just scaring the shit out of people all the

time about poisons and chemicals, so we're trying to see if there's an alternative answer. I can't tell you who it is, but we have a spokesperson who says, 'Well, maybe organic's the answer.' We don't think so. We think organic is stoners and hippies, and we just don't want to be seen as promoting that. But we trust *you*, and we'd like to know: what do you think?" And so it eventually got to the point where they said, "Well, let me give all this paper to this anonymous spokesperson, and then we'll see if she wants to promote organic, because she eats it, but we're still really nervous about using the name." The woman was Meryl Streep.

Reti: Oh, my gosh!

Scowcroft: The campaign was about twenty suspected carcinogen chemicals in a report that Meryl and NRDC had released to *60 Minutes*. Meryl and another woman named Wendy Gordon then started a group called Mothers and Others for a Livable Planet. And Meryl said she was for organic, very forcefully, under the Mothers and Others name, rather than the National Resources Defense Council, because that was too much for them at the time.

And so [chuckles]—we had one phone. We had one of those old AT&T phones in our office, and we were in the *Good Times* Building. It was '89, before the earthquake. And that really blew up, and the phone was really ringing off the hook, but it was manageable. We didn't have call waiting until she appeared on the [Phil] Donahue show two weeks later. It was so interesting, in hindsight, to look at the impact of *60 Minutes*, where other reporters: "Hi. I am with this association and we hear you're one of the resources, and how can you say this

and that?" But you'd have a few minutes in between the next call. And then one afternoon, she [Meryl Streep] appeared on the Donahue show and looked at him. He said, "Now, wh-, wh-, what are we supposed to do?" And she said, "What you're supposed to do is eat organic food. Go to natural food stores. Buy organic broccoli. Toxic chemicals are on conventional food. Buy organic food." And by the time she said the word "food," our phone exploded.

Reti: Right there.

Scowcroft: Right there. That afternoon. And within a week, we had call waiting, and then the phone broke. I don't know where it is. For years, I had saved the blue phone with all these wires coming out of it, because it had been picked up and put down so many times that the plastic broke on the phone.

We did a number of briefings after that for her and NRDC. Apple growers were suing her personally. Alar then was the chemical that for some reason *60 Minutes* focused on more than any other one. And to this day, the sound bite is "the Alar scare." To this day I correct it every single time. It wasn't a scare. It was the truth, and Alar *is* off the market, and it *is* a carcinogen, and it is still persistent out there. We were right on *everything*.[14] Some of the growers that sued Meryl Streep are now certified organic fifteen years later, as well.

We went from three hundred to eight hundred farmers in six months. Our finances went completely ballistic.

The Loma Prieta Earthquake and CCOF

Then we had the earthquake, and we lost our downtown office, and we had to, through the National Guard, move thirty file drawers out of the office. We had three hours, and they wouldn't come rescue us; they wouldn't do these things, and we all went in and pulled those out.

Reti: Did you save all the records?

Scowcroft: We lost some things, but we saved all the farmers' records. I have photos of them all laying out in my front yard, just file drawers. We couldn't take out the cabinets because some had fallen over and things had fallen in, but we got it all out.

CCOF was the leader in creating what would be allowed and not allowed in the world of materials. Kate Burroughs, who was Harmony Farm Supply, was also the original CCOF materials person. She's retired, and she's in theory going to ship me thirty years of [minutes of] CCOF materials committee meetings. This is national history on how we decided what was allowed and what's not allowed, and where the windows were built for synthetics to be approved, and the windows were built for naturals to be banned. Nicotine is a carcinogen and it's a naturally-occurring chemical, so we banned it in CCOF first, and didn't allow it in CCOF growers. Other organic groups did allow it for a number of years. So we had that going on.

The Carrot Caper

I think maybe the carrot caper came first.

Reti: I think it was 1988.

Scowcroft: And that was a case where this forty-acre grower now had two or three hundred acres, and there was one other grower, in carrots primarily, but he kind of invented the farming-like-a-quilt concept. He was moving these ten acres of carrots all around this 400-acre parcel with cover crops and onions and potatoes and so forth. So he was confusing the pests, but he always had carrots, and that was his major cash crop. He had learned from this woman in San Diego how to grow organic carrots. Then he was out of carrots. His ten acres were done, and there was this little window before his next ten acres came on. He was farming in Weed Patch, California, and yet there were all these organic carrots everywhere. And so they [the state of California] did a little investigation. They were sure it was bogus, but they couldn't figure out how to bust him, or what to do, and came to CCOF and said, "Hey, it's your job." Everybody thought it was our job to do everything around organic. So Brammer and I talked about it, and we filed a letter with the state and said, "Well, here, you got a law. We know this is not organic. Do something." And they said, "Well, there's nowhere in the law that says we have to do anything. It's just a labeling law." "Well, if it's labeled illegally, you have consumer affairs investigate and enforce it." They still responded, "No, no way."

So we went to the CCOF board, and again, probably in a ten-to-six vote, the board approved the hiring of an attorney to go to the state and threaten to sue them if they wouldn't enforce it. His name was Barry Epstein. That got their attention, but they said, "No, we're still not going to do it. You sort of should

have a new law, but we'll forward it to this division as a formal complaint." Because Barry made a legal link on consumer affairs on the false labeling and marketing. But it still wasn't happening fast enough.

So this woman who worked for a distributor at the time said, "Hey, I know they're doing it [falsely labeling carrots], and I found their warehouse. So I'll go in and pretend I'm writing for a newsletter. I'll take my camera, and I'll do a story on this organic business that's grown really big and successful and interview people, and maybe I can get some photos." And she actually went in and took shots of the eighteen-wheelers coming in with Mexican carrots—

Reti: [Intake of breath.]

Scowcroft: —and the workers taking an organic bag and re-bagging them from conventional to organically labeled bags. She took these photos under some risk. We found out later probably a lot more risk, because the person running it (it was rumored) was a wanted felon within the USDA—fraudulent activity for food stamps or something like that. He had been scamming that division, and this was his new scam. She gave me the photos, saying, "Here they are. Here's what's going on. You gotta do the rest because I can't really be part of this." So I went to Brammer and said, "The only other way I know how to do it is to get a front-page news story," and so again we kind of, at the executive-committee level of CCOF said, "Here's the risk: bogus organic, cheating and fraud, and the risk is that, yeah, everybody does it, there's no real law, and this is just a fad. The flip side of it is we bust him. We succeed. We embarrass the state, and we come out saying, 'We're muscular, and we're not taking this crap anymore. If the state

won't do it, we will.'" It was a very hardy and vigorous debate, and the end result was, "Yes, Bob. You go. You seem to know what you're doing, and you know the press, and let's take the risk. I mean, what worth is it to be certified organic if we know there's fraud?"

I had met a reporter for the *San Jose Mercury News*, which was a very powerful paper at the time, before these days of media mayhem, and went to him, one-on-one. I drove over there and went to him and laid out these things. I said, "I got a story that'll put you on the front page. I'm sure of it."[15] He was kind of young. He said, "Well, this is real, and it's a good story." And we went back and forth, and his editors were really concerned, in particular, that they didn't have permission for the photos and so on and so forth. We had a bunch of at-home, late night— "My editor, I got three hours left, he's pulled it—" Mitchel Benson was his name, and the *Mercury* put him on the front page, with the photo of the worker holding the organic bag with the Mexican conventional carrots here being re-packed. Within seventy-two hours, the Associated Press had picked it up, and about twenty other papers called CCOF. We said, [to the media] "You call the state. We filed the complaint. Here's our attorney. We filed the complaint. This has got to stop right now. Here's his address."

Cameras went down there. And for about a day, he [the farmer] said, "No, these people are just trying to— They're special interest. Then he disappeared, just fled everything, and the state was really embarrassed and then did an investigation and agreed that it was fraudulent. CCOF then was on the media map. The state said, "Well, we're not going to do anything anymore. We're not going to do any

more of this enforcement. We have no budget, no money, no nothin'." So CCOF had another board meeting, and determined to hire Barry to work with a guy named Mark Lipson to write a new organic foods act for California.

The California Organic Foods Act of 1990

Reti: This is the one that Sam Farr sponsored in the state legislature?

Scowcroft: Yes, Darryl Young was the legislative assistant that wrote it with Mark Lipson sleeping on the office couch in Sacramento. And Sam Farr sponsored it.

California had a one-year transition to organics, while Oregon and Washington had a three-year [transition period]. So we had started meeting with Oregon Tilth (Yvonne Frost in particular), and Miles McEvoy and Ann Schwarz in Washington Tilth. And we made really a handshake agreement. A few of the NOFAs came out to Eco-Farm that winter and we met with them too, Elizabeth Henderson in particular. NOFA is the Northeast Organic Farming Association, which was sort of set up like CCOF. So we did a handshake that if California went to three-year transition instead of one (because Oregon was starting to say no California product coming to Oregon, because it was one rather than three years of transition), they would then adopt our materials list. Although Yvonne and Harry MacCormack were working on an actual farm plant and materials list, it was still very ad hoc. Oregon had a regulation; that was their problem. They didn't have a state law. Lynn Coody was involved then too. So we did a little circle and "held hands," about ten of us, and said: About eight of us will all write laws to make all three states' regulations the same for interstate commerce. We'll

go to three years if you'll get a law and have these materials, and Washington, you do the same."

And Gene Kahn said, "Well, I've got Cascadian Farms and want to contribute. I'll pay for all of this. I'll fly people in and support your work." "Pay for all of it" meant ten, twenty thousand dollars total—one five-hundred-dollar gift here and a thousand dollars there. So we called ourselves the Western Alliance of Certification Organizations, or WACO [pronounced wacko].

Reti: [Chuckles.]

Scowcroft: And we had no budget, no staff, no minutes, no formal meetings. We just got together three to five times a year for about two years, and we wrote legislation. We just said, anybody can do it. I was the only one (maybe two or three others) that had kind of national legislative experience at that time, and I think Lynn had a little bit. And I said, "Yes, we should just go for it. You'd be amazed. People get so little mail and so few new ideas. Just walk in there with an attitude and say, 'We're here to write an organic food act.'"

Of course, we had Jim Weaver. And then his legislative assistant, Peter DeFazio, became a congressman. Weaver retired, and Peter ran, and he won. So now we had a friend in Congress that "we" had been around (mostly Oregon Tilth) for ten years or more. It's all this network of small friends. Not in size physically, but rather in placement within the grand agricultural scheme. We pulled that off, and Barry's work in California became more contentious, and some bigger players got involved in it (both for and against). But the legislature signed off on

it, and [then California Governor George] Deukmejian was the one who signed the law, as a Republican.

Federal Organic Foods Production Act of 1990

As the carrot caper and then this WACO dialogue getting three laws was happening, this aide for [Vermont] Senator [Patrick] Leahy called the CCOF office (It must have been '89 as well; maybe it was around Alar), saying that these NOFAs were doing stuff in Vermont and wanting state regulations, and there was this organic milk coming out, and she had heard there was organic activity in California. Mark (Lipson) was going to Washington for something, and I said, "Hey, go into Kathleen Merrigan's office and tell them we need standardization. We need a national law. What the hell?" [Chuckles.][16]

And so when Kathleen tells her story, it was this guy, Mark Lipson, who just walked in and said, "Well, I'm here from CCOF, and we need a national law because these three states—we got it together—but there's bogus product everywhere else beating us up." And that was the beginning of the [Federal] Organic Foods Production Act, which was approved by 1990. That happened almost parallel to the state a couple of months later. The [federal] regs were to be promulgated in eighteen months, and it took them eight years.

Reti: That's the part that took so long.

Scowcroft: But the sixteen-page law was part of the Farm Bill, I think. No hearings were held in the House. Representative [Charles] Stenholm (D-Texas) wouldn't allow any conversation of the "O word" at all, and no ag committee, no

subcommittee, full committee. Lynn Coody called up Representative Peter DeFazio and said, "Hey, on behalf of WACO, would you carry this whole bill [Organic Foods Production Act] that we've written?" He said, "Sure. I'm a back bencher. I'll go for it." It won 190 to 182, or something like that. And it was the only amendment to the Farm Bill that passed. There was never a hearing held in the entire House of Representatives on this. It kind of surprised everybody that it passed.

One hearing was held in the Senate ag committee. It was chaired by Leahy at the time, and Merrigan was his staffer, and he got [Iowa] Senator [Tom] Harkin to attend. It was just a room. It wasn't even the big Senate Ag Committee hearing room, just a side room with a table and a gavel. They gaveled it in, and there was about twenty-five of us sitting on the outside perimeter of the room, and three or four people testified. We got [California] Senator Alan Cranston to attend. I was in the room and Cranston came. We had made a formal request that he attend and endorse organic for the state of California. And he came in the room. Harkin said, "Senator Cranston! What are *you* doing here?" He said, "Well, I'm here to endorse and back CCOF, and want to listen to some of the testimony." So they had three senators there. And the reason Senator Cranston was there was three months before, CCOF had invited him to meet some of the leading growers in the Central Coast, at a place called the UC Santa Cruz Farm and Garden.[17] We set that up with Steve [Gliessman] and Tom O'Leary, the media person [from UCSC Public Information] then. It still, to this day, gives me a chuckle because no one had told the administration that this was happening. And Senator Cranston had never been to the campus—

Reti: No kidding!

Scowcroft: —I don't believe. Or if he had—I'm not sure he had been to the campus, but I'm sure somebody can check. But we had Sam Farr and Senator Cranston come to the Gatehouse and meet organic farmers from the area. I guess this was before '90. This was, like, '89 as well. Eighty-nine and '90 were killer years. [Cranston] got a ride up to the door, and Sam [Farr] came up, and Jim Cochran [of Swanton Berry Farms] was there.[18] I have a photo of everybody in the room. I have one photo on my desk. I'm not much for standing next to anybody, but this was a pretty cool moment, of me holding Cochran's strawberries with Sam Farr eating them on this side [demonstrates] and Cranston eating them on this side [demonstrates]. And Cranston goes, "It's unbelievable! These taste— These are— They're perfect."

So as part of this meeting—the Pavich family was a pretty big grape grower, and we invited them to show that Kern County, a thousand acres— You know, "Here's Tom Pavich. This is a real deal." And we were still on sort of the defensive, alternative image, but Jack Pandol, Pandol and Sons [Pandol Brothers Inc.], had gotten wind there was this meeting with Cranston. He was personal friends with Reagan. He was *the* state ag power in the seventies and eighties. The Pandol family is a very historic family in California agriculture. And the number one was Jack Pandol, Sr. He asked if he could come to this meeting, called me up and said, "I don't know how you work, but I'll give you three chips, or three things. I'll do stuff for you. Three asks. I've never met Senator Cranston. We all know I'm a Republican to the core, but [I] just would like to meet him and tell

him I respect him, and this is the only opportunity I'll have. Can I come to the meeting?"

Reti: So it had nothing to do with organics.

Scowcroft: Well, he was thinking about putting an organic parcel in. So he said, "Go around the table and I'll tell him that I'm thinking of going organic, that this is not a fad anymore. When Pandol speaks and when Pandol is interested, this valley will listen." I said, "Okay, and I'll keep you on those three chips as well. I won't forget them."

So he came to the meeting. Cranston had incredible staff. I must have had fifty calls with his staff before this meeting. "Who's coming?" They did background. They're like, "Pandol's coming, and Pavich? These are real—" "Yes! Organic is real. These are farmers. And you're coming to the only place in California where research and training is happening. The land grants are miserable, and this is the only oasis we know of. So get a tour and photos and you'll meet some real farmers."

So Cranston was blown away, and he stayed an extra thirty or forty minutes. The university heard about it the night before and sent someone from the Public Information Office to at least take photographs, but they were really upset with (or at least I heard) with everybody in Agroecology. [chuckles] You know, the most important senator, the number two in the Senate (I think he was whip at the time) had come to Agroecology. They weren't able to give him a tour [of the

UCSC campus] and show him the buildings and all these things. And he wanted to see the *Farm and Garden*! I'm very pleased [with] my little role there.

So one of our asks of Cranston was, "Come to the hearings and publicly pronounce this," which he did. And one of the three chips we used with Jack Pandol was to call Deukmejian personally and put his name on the signature.

Reti: Ohh.

Scowcroft: And he said he would do it. I talked to him. He did do it, and Deukmejian assured him if Pandol was going to farm organic that he would sign the bill. Sometimes that's how it works.

Reti: Yes. That explains a lot.

Scowcroft: We used the second chip when the Organic Foods Production Act was passed and went to the President. Jack Pandol Sr. called George Bush Sr. [George H.W. Bush] and said he was farming organic and he wanted him to sign that. And I still have the third chip.

Reti: (laughs)

Scowcroft: Pandol's in his late eighties now. I don't know if I'll get to use that, and I'm not sure he would remember it at this time. They have since stopped farming organic, which is kind of another interesting little sidebar. They pulled out of organics, and all the conventional Kern ag types said, "See, I told ya. It didn't really work. It's not a thing." And Pandol very publicly and repeatedly said, "No, no, no, no. Going organic was the best thing we ever did for our

operation. We didn't know how to *market* it. The Paviches and the [Marko] Zininoviches beat the pants off us in marketing. But our forty acres of organic grapes became—and to an extent still is—managed organically because it's now our R&D center. We've eliminated our entire fertilization program on our thousands and thousands of acres in Chile, around the world, thanks to that organic opportunity. We do nothing but cover crop and compost now. So don't you guys ever bash organic. It is the real thing, both practically— It's just we never got a foothold in the marketing of it." In the nineties, in particular, he was pretty forceful within his own constituencies, [about] whether it was a fad or not, or real or not.

The Founding of the Organic Farming Research Foundation [OFRF]

Reti: So OFRF [Organic Farming Research Foundation] started out as a part of CCOF?

Scowcroft: Well, as if we had nothing else to do in '89 or '90, in response to both carrots and Alar, people were calling us from all over the country: "Can I get into CCOF?" "Can you send me your handbook?" "How does this material work?" "Can I get your newsletter?" All of the above. And we were chartered for just California. We now had moved to the Sash Mill [building, in Santa Cruz]. We took visitors from all fifty states, from Scandinavia; we had Japanese visitors—all wanting to know about organic. Since CCOF wasn't really clear what it did beyond its certification, we just said, "Okay, well we'll do that, too. We'll take this meeting and we'll do some marketing and promotion." And we had the press after the carrot caper calling us looking for, "Hey, I'm with AP. I need to

find this." Or, "Is there anybody in Oklahoma?" And we generally did know at least who to ask, if not [information on] somebody in Oklahoma that we had kept in a file drawer, because we didn't have really computers yet.

By then, the financial meltdown had finally hit CCOF. We were deep in the hole, and my skill sets were very limited in managing cash flow and keeping modern books, and we hadn't really budgeted the money to hire a bookkeeper. It was a very difficult time. We were trying to serve eight or nine hundred growers, and now we had eight staff, and every payroll was an exercise in holding your breath.

Reti: You're saying you grew too fast? There was this explosion.

Scowcroft: You couldn't say, "Oh, I'm sorry, you're [the] 804th person to send your application in. I'm not taking your twenty-five dollars."

Reti: Yes.

Scowcroft: And so then you'd go to the board and say, "Seventy-five dollars for application and renewal fees might be more appropriate," and somebody would say, "But that's hurting small farmers." In this three-year period, I don't think there was hardly a board meeting where somebody didn't call for my resignation. We would laugh a lot. It wasn't really personality-based. It was the Southern California chapter that wanted to be independent, or, "The big guys from Kern County are ruining us over here on the coast, and the statewide office is supporting them. Those guys in Santa Cruz are supporting the big guys, and

we're little, and we got to fire them," or, "We gotta recalibrate this," or, "There they go again, raising our fees. They just help the big guys."

It was a constant struggle to get income aligned with expense, and we didn't have certain tools and protocol to manage that. We had to do inspections. We had to take applications. We had to have some fee base. And it was seasonal. In the spring, all the renewals would go out, and people would send you the checks of a percentage of what they sold all last year. But in January, you had nothing, and so are you going to get paid or not? I wasn't skilled enough to figure that out.

So I went to the board and said, "Okay, this is not working. This is not sustainable." And the board said, "Well, we have a couple of bookkeepers, so we'll hire someone to come in and clean up all the books. We'll assign accrual numbers, and we'll have cash flow projections, and we'll do everything a nonprofit should do at the next level." That was great. "And we'll raise some fees." That's great. "And then maybe we can just get money from somewhere else, or ask for donations, or have supporting members or something."

I said, "That's great. We're an educational entity as well," even though we were a (c)(5), I think, an ag trade association in the eyes of the feds. All our tax returns had been done. We weren't in violation. We were just struggling to make ends meet by growth and the era of limits on my managerial competence for administration.

So I went to an old Friends of the Earth contact in a foundation and said, "Hey, we do this educational work. We publish stuff in a newsletter. We have Brian Baker, who's brilliant, writing "Science You Can Use," his column. Could you support it?" She said, "I've been kind of following you. You've done a couple of things. I met you after you left FOE and had you up here with NRDC and heard from Laurie Mott (who was then my contact at NRDC), 'You guys are doing good work.' Tell you what. If you found a sister organization, we'll be proud to make the first grant." Friends of the Earth had Friends of the Earth Foundation. Most everybody already had their foundations in the enviros world. So she was just saying, "Replicate. Do a CCOF foundation. Get your (c)(3) status, and we'd love to make the first grant to you." So I went back to the board and said, "Well, here's an idea. [Chuckles.] We'll start another organization."

Reti: (laughs)

Scowcroft: And three farmers stood up on the board and said, "Great. That's a great idea." Another vote. This one might have been 11 to 4. So they approved that, and they approved, I think, a thousand dollars to spend on consultants or whatever it took, and Warren Weber again stepped up, and he made a couple of small gifts as well. And a gentleman named Mark Nielson said, "Well, I'll be the president, and I'll write the articles of incorporation and the bylaws." And Warren said, "Well, I'll review those and be vice president." And Patti LaBoyteaux, I think, was the third one, and she said, "I'll review all of this, and we'll have kind of an ad hoc committee to bring this to the board." They did. By then, I knew the ins and outs of the IRS application process, because I had

learned by doing all these other issues with CCOF. So we had everything done pretty quickly, and brought it in. Now we need a mission and a purpose. Mark Lipson, he had kind of come in and out a couple of times in CCOF. Was he going to farm full time in Molino Creek Farms? But he was in the office. Mark said, "Oh, I'll do this," and he wrote the mission and the purpose in about fifteen minutes. We have never been able to change those words. Every time we've done a strategic plan or looked at those, the widespread adoption— I mean, it's stood the stress of time. I think in the strategic plan we just added "systems" to it. It took us five months to add the word "organic farming systems" instead of just "organic farming."[19]

Reti: The whole idea of food systems.

Scowcroft: Right. That took us twenty years to do that.

Reti: [Chuckles.]

Scowcroft: And so they went back, and then they created a separate board. I don't know if Patti was on the separate board, but it was almost entirely CCOF growers: Bill Brammer— They created a permanent seat for the CCOF president, so whoever became president was always on the OFRF board. They called it the Organic Farming Research Foundation. We got the (c)(3) status in about six months, and the next week the Columbia Foundation made a $20,000 gift. About thirty-six hours later, $19,800.00 was moved to CCOF as an educational grant, and that's how CCOF got its extra money for the first two years.

We had a P.O. box and a little tape machine. Denesse Willey was a founding board member and served as treasurer. So for about two years it was CCOF growers, not necessarily CCOF board members, although some of them were on it. But Jill Auburn got on it almost right away. Kathy Barsotti got on right away; Harry McCormick, who was the president of Oregon Tilth, was the first non-CCOF grower and out-of-state person on the board. We had the director of Consumers Union—we had one seat for Consumers, Harry somebody. He never made it to a board meeting, but he was on the founding board list. And a couple of other growers.

And for two years we got money from Columbia and some other foundations [who] understood that it was supporting CCOF's educational work, largely Brian Baker's work, and our newsletter, and information outreach. We kept little time sheets as I had done at Friends of the Earth. We got maybe a hundred, a hundred and fifty thousand from '90 to '92.

And right around '91—now we're in the Sash Mill—I'm upstairs, and I hear somebody come in saying, "Hey, I'm just passing through town. I'm kind of living here. Is Bob Scowcroft here? I feel like I know him. I worked at Friends of the Earth after it went bankrupt, and all the papers of the San Francisco office got shipped to D.C., and I was the office manager." The staff person said, "No, no, he can't be taking meetings right now. Everybody wants to talk to him. Make an appointment."

But I heard this "Friends of the Earth," so I said, "Hey! I'm up here. C'mon up," you know. And this woman, Erica Walz, came up and said, "Yes, I'm just kind of

passing through. I'm an office manager, looking for work. My boyfriend's here. I just wanted to meet you. I got all your papers and looked—you know, shredded them, got rid of most of them, and it was kind of interesting, the stuff you did. And do you know of any jobs or anything around here?" I said, "Well, I have this thing called Organic Farming Research Foundation—"

Reti: (laughs)

Scowcroft: —"And that tape machine has six messages on it, and there's a P.O. box. I got enough money for four hours a week. Ten dollars an hour. Would you want to do that? Any old FOE staffer is good with me." And she said, "Yes, sure. I'm just hanging around to see whatever will unfold, but I'll do that." So she was employee number one, as she still remains, although she moved to Escalante, Utah, years ago. She runs our Information Bulletin newsletter and all our Web stuff out of her home, three-quarters time. She's been working for seventeen years as an OFRF employee.

Becoming Executive Director of OFRF

So by '92, some board members had left, and it was getting real. And all these CCOF growers said, "We want to do more than CCOF. We think it's fine that we're giving them money, and we have no problem there. Mark Nielson, in particular, [said], "We want to start funding on-farm organic research. It's called the Organic Farming Research Foundation, and we want to start funding research. And Garth Youngberg's out there, and information's hard to come by, and the land grants stink, and farmers have the best and most knowledge of all. So let's do a survey of the farmers and see what they want us to do with

research, and put a little 'give us money' coupon in that survey. And then if we raise enough money and get $40,000 in the bank (after CCOF grants), we'll hire an executive director."

And everybody said, "Yes, gung-ho." By then, Erica I think was ten hours a week. So she created a survey and sent it around, and we got ten or fifteen thousand. And the Heller Foundation, I think, came on board, and this foundation called Wallace Genetic Foundation came on board and gave money. And lo and behold—we were still giving CCOF twenty to forty thousand every six months, but we had forty thousand more in the bank. So they said, "Hey, we did it. Way to go, Bob. Now we're going to hire an ED. Let's put out a notice." And I did that as acting director, and they got fifty-some-odd applications for an organization that had no address, could be located anywhere, a P.O. box and a phone number. Fifty people said, "This idea is so good, I want to take it over."

Reti: It was really the perfect timing.

Scowcroft: Yes, again, it was like Garth's non-profit had been going a couple of years now, and Eco-Farm was starting to get big, and I think Miguel [Altieri] had a bigger coffee table.

Reti: (laughs)

Scowcroft: And there were a few other scientists showing up now, ready to come out of the organic closet and say, "I'm an organic systems researcher, damn it. It's none of the IPM [integrated pest management] stuff or [more general]

sustainability stuff. I want certified organic food and farming out there, and I'm studying it. What are you gonna do about it?"

So the hiring committee was formed, and they did a very rigorous review. I'd gone home to Judy and said, "You know, this getting called for resignation every quarter—" CCOF was a very intensive group because it had an executive committee meeting in between every board meeting. So there were eight meetings a year, all over the state, and it was just tiring. It had been a heck of a five years. Bill Brammer had been president the whole time, and we'd been an amazing team together. Bill was going, "I'm trying to farm and go to eight meetings a year. I'm kind of running at the end of my thing." And so I went home and said, "What do you think about me starting again from scratch?" (laughs)

Reti: (laughs)

Scowcroft: "Dear."

Reti: "Here's a good solution. How does that sound? Much less stressful?" (laughs)

Scowcroft: Yes, much less. [laughs] She, by then, had started working for McGraw Hill and had benefits. She said, "You know, this is crazy, and it's draining, and sure, let's go for it." So I applied, and that didn't really mean much of anything to the hiring committee. As I said, they had six finalists and interviewed all six and then got it down to two, and then offered me the position, and I accepted it and gave notice at CCOF.

And, again, some responded by saying, "You just did this [created OFRF] to take our money and go your way." But others were very, "Yes, this is great. Now we'll have research out there, and you're talented. You will pull it off." We had OFRF in my house for over a year. I have a little closet. Erica was half time, but she couldn't quite make it on half time, and so two other people stepped in, too, for four hours a week. And Judy is wonderful. By then we had two children, so I got to watch the kids for a year or pick them up or drive them around while she worked in Monterey. One OFRF staff would be at the kitchen table, and one would be at the computer in the closet.

Then we continued to raise money, enough such that we took a large "closet" office back at the Sash Mill again, in one of the corners there. It was just Erica and I, but we had raised enough money by then. We were starting to make grants. The board started to raise a little bit of money. I think our budgets were about a hundred and fifty thousand, two hundred thousand a year.

Organic Leadership Conferences at the Claremont Hotel in Berkeley

We got the idea to do another survey, much more rigorous, of the nation's organic farmers, and by doing that survey, we would also send them our newsletter free of charge. And since chaos was unfolding everywhere in the political arena, we decided to hire the Claremont Resort and host a national organic leadership conference there as well, just Erica and I and the OFRF board. We raised underwriting money, and two hundred people came. We took eighty rooms at the Claremont, and had Shapiro from *Newsweek,* and had amazing

speakers. Garth [Youngberg] was a keynote, Wes [Jackson], and we just brought in everybody we knew.

Reti: When was this?

Scowcroft: Ninety-three was the first one. We did five of them every other year. The Claremont conferences are very famous within the organic community. A lot of things started there, like Miles McEvoy— The state of Washington and Miles implemented organic laws in a different way. The state had a law, and the state enforced the organic law, and the state certified, and Washington Tilth became just a marketing and advocacy nonprofit. Two other states had taken the same route. So Miles invited them, and then two other states heard that state employees were going to be at this conference. So they had six states represented, and they went to a table, and they started the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture working on organic that now has forty states involved in it.

Another break-out group on organic cotton. We had Sally Fox there. And Renee Robin was an attorney for a law firm, and the law firm underwrote our conference and sent her. There were only four people who went to the break-out group. One worked for Levi's, and one worked for the Gap, and one worked for Nike. Maybe Patagonia was there too? So they looked at each other and said, "Gee, this is on the edge. This is not quite collusion, but there's kind of competition." "Well, no, we're just talking about organic cotton." So they talked about it. In the end they said, "Hey, how about if we all go back, and without doing any legal or labeling, just go back to our bosses and say, 'How about doing

a good thing and trying to get three percent of all our cotton organic? You know, establish a floor for the organic cotton industry.'" And that's how the organic cotton buys started at Nike, Levi's, and The Gap, with the break-out group at our conference.

So people started hearing this, and more people came, and we did it five times over ten years. One year we had ninety-five venture capital firms attend. Because this was the boom time. We had Peter Roy speaking from Whole Foods; we had John Blackstone from *CBS Evening News*. It was the "epic dating-service card exchange:" "I'm a venture capitalist." "I'm a stoned organic farmer." "I'm a multinational corporation." "I'm evening news." "I'm AP." "I'm Cascadian Farm." "I'm Horizon Dairy." So we did this five times total, and we just started it again in Boulder [Colorado] last summer.

Reti: Oh, that was the conference in Boulder that I've heard about.

Scowcroft: Yes. But that started at the Claremont, and we did it every other year.

Reti: A far cry from La Honda, with the "no showers" experience of the early Eco-Farm conferences.

Scowcroft: It was bourgeois. People were coming and saying, "Finally! I mean, that was Eco-Farm. But here, I'm gonna get a facial, and let's go over to Chez Panisse." It was taking advantage of the wave of the time. We got critiqued (as expensive), and some of it was very appropriate. Not every conference is made for everybody. But OFRF was known as the originator of the idea, and the primary sponsor. And all of them broke even, with one exception, and that was

the one in '93. We lost a little bit of money, but we didn't do any other fundraising or anything for three months leading up to the conference! All of a sudden the conference was over, and we had fifty or sixty thousand dollars' worth of bills. We had about fifty or sixty thousand dollars to our name, and nothing coming in for three months for proposals and deadlines. So it was tough for Erica and I to make it through that window. And we just waited until we raised more funds, paid ourselves whenever we got some.

Reti: What made you want to start doing that conference again?

Scowcroft: The arrival of a whole generation that didn't even know about the nineties and what got organic to where it is, the bitterness of a few of the edgy folks that are coming to organic as a negative—

Reti: I'm sorry, I'm not understanding what you mean by that.

Scowcroft: We've always been scale neutral. There have been some really small growers that are horrific cheaters and have "enslaved" their workers, and some incredibly large companies that have excellent benefits and have health plans, and are doing great things. So the negativity, really collateral negativity around the Harvey lawsuit[20] and big and small, and these small groups that have grabbed a particular tale of, "You've all sold out, and you're all just evil," led me to write an article for *Green Money Journal* saying, "It's time to have the organic conversation again."[21]

Reti: I read that. That's a great article.

Scowcroft: Some of the folks that I butted heads with over the Harvey lawsuit were old friends, and we were having tough times, and we were having harsh words, and "I don't know if we can talk again" type conversations. [Some suggested], "You know, this wouldn't have happened if we had had the Claremont, if you'd kept doing that. We would have seen this coming. We would have better understood each other. It wouldn't have been by sound bite, or press release, or screaming phone calls. This would have evolved." I said, "Yes, I think you're right." So a number of us said, "Let's begin this conversation as if the future mattered, rather than as if the past is toxic." So that was what came about. A couple of those guys said, "Hey, I'm happy to put up underwriting money and stick my name out there and say, 'It's time for us and you guys and the NGOs [non-governmental organizations] to start talking again.'" And I said, "Well, I'm happy to stick my neck out, because that's where it's been the whole time anyway!"

Reti: Yes, it sure sounds like it.

Scowcroft: And the tradeshow folks who I've known for twenty-seven years said, "Hey, we want to underwrite it. We think there's a profit center here, so how 'bout a public-private partnership? We'll take *all* the risks this time. We'll pay for the hotel; we'll pay for the speakers; we'll do the budget, and if we come out with a profit, we'll give you a portion of the receipts. So you have no downside. OFRF will not lose any money." That was attractive to our board. So we did it again, and we did get a nice contribution from them when it was over.

Tasting of Summer Produce

Reti: Let's talk about the Tasting of Summer Produce.

Scowcroft: Tasting of Summer Produce, I think, was in '83 or '84.[22] Izzy Martin, who was a key early figure in a lot of this, Izzy worked for California Action Network [CAN], which is now CAFF [Community Alliance with Family Farmers]. She was one of the co-founders of that, and she was part of the original lawsuit against UC that created the Sustainable Agriculture Research Education Project [SAREP], out of the tomato harvester lawsuit.[23] She came out of the farm labor, Don Villarejo movement[24], and when UC Davis invented the tomato harvester and threw 60,000 farm workers out of work to mechanically harvest tomatoes, they sued the land grant [the University of California], saying, "There's an impact here, folks. You're supposed to be a land grant for the public benefit, and you just threw 60,000 people out of work, and entire towns, you decimated."

From that, came the California Action Network, and from that came litigation, and they settled and formed the SAREP program at UC Davis. And Izzy then went out and started doing organizing (because she is one of the best ones of all), and started bringing different people to Eco-Farm, like me, and linking up with other activists. And I don't know how she got into Alice's [Alice Waters's] world, but Alice all of a sudden was going to do this Tasting of Summer Produce [festival] and bring in, in August, these amazing, small, family farmers that had been selling product to her, or in a few farmers' markets. Remember, farmers' markets were largely illegal in the seventies and eighties. There were only

twenty or thirty of them, and you couldn't taste anything, and a guy named Vance Corum came along, under Jerry Brown, and got Brown to agree to start farmers' markets and take away some of the illegalities around them.

Reti: Vance Corum.

Scowcroft: Yes.

Reti: Who was he?[25]

Scowcroft: He's an activist that had started a farmers' market, I think maybe the Santa Monica Farmers' Market. The Santa Monica city officials said, "I'm sorry. We want this. This is a good thing." And the state was saying, "No, no. People touching food is not a good thing. You can't have farmers just handing over their tangerines to somebody buying it. This is not right."

Reti: (laughs)

Scowcroft: So this was going on, too.

Reti: Yes, it's an important piece of it, for sure.

Scowcroft: It's really an important piece. And so I think Vance was there. Somehow Alice had known him. So, again, six to eight of us were invited to be speakers or resource people for the press that might come to this Tasting of Summer Produce. And I think they had sixty to eighty farmers with a card table, and the Oakland Museum was the host, and somehow they were able to cut and let you taste, which was a little bit controversial at the time. Sally Shepard, Janet

Fletcher and Mimi Luebbermann were the organizers and the press people around this. Mimi Luebbermann—later on, we hired her to run four of the five Claremont conferences that I was talking about. Janet Fletcher is a reporter for the *[San Francisco] Chronicle* now, and Sally Shepard's half retired as a PR person to just five clients, one of which is Nell Newman. So Sally is Newman's Own Organics' PR firm. So, again, the network from this one event has created life connections.

This was an effort to bring family farms and their products to the press's attention and to the Bay Area's attention. There may be other chefs who had set up a relationship, but we had [progressive populist and former Texas agriculture commissioner Jim] Hightower as the radical activist coming in, and Izzy with CAN, and me at Friends of the Earth. And this is an event that got immediately out of hand before it even started.

Reti: Out of hand?

Scowcroft: Well, chefs from all over the country said, "I thought I was all alone. I thought I was the only one trying to buy fresh and local, and I got to be here, both to meet these farmers and to meet Alice and just to see what is going on in the Bay Area. This is a leading event here." People were jumping on planes and flying out. Farmers were there saying: "I [only] ship from Davis to Sacramento. This is the most amazing heirloom tomato you've ever eaten, and you're from Atlanta, Georgia? Find a farmer. I can't deal with this."

Reti: (laughs)

Scowcroft: There was pandemonium. The tables were five deep, and people were, "Have you tasted the melon over on table nineteen?" "Have you tasted— There's this Hispanic heritage family with these peppers that'll make you cry, and we've never found them in *any* market!" Veritable Vegetable and Green Leaf were the only distributors there, and they were involved in this a little bit, but there was nobody else. You couldn't even figure out how to buy it, sell it, and distribute it.

It *was* a celebration, and it was: We are bigger, larger. We are economically more powerful. We're national. We're eating fresh, organic, great food that was harvested yesterday, varieties of corn.

And then we all kind of went away and said, "What just happened?" And particularly the Oakland Museum, who had almost no real history with food— Somebody in the trustees— I have no idea how Alice pulled this off. Sibella Kraus was the other key person, and Sibella coordinated all this. She'd cooked for Alice and was a food activist. I think Sibella was maybe the head of it, and had then turned around and gotten her friends, Mimi and Sally and some of the others, in there to help out.

So they decided to do [it] again the next year. And if they thought it was pandemonium the first year at Oakland, the next year was even more— They were now looking at selling out, and maybe closing the museum, and the crowds— And they'd selected some chefs to cook for the farmers, so there was kind of a dinner. Fifty chefs wanted to cook and thank the farmers, and they only had room for ten. People were a little irritated, because they wanted to show

their spirit. And they wanted to bring their farmer, too, because they had found the best strawberries in Michigan.

I think they did it one more year. The third year they opened it up to the public, and you had a farmers' market on day two. Then you had the Oakland community, of all ethnic varieties, coming through, eating the most amazing—you know, Hmong and African-Americans—they weren't able to find varieties that were their own culture's: "Do you have chard or Laotian lemon grass?" And chefs had little tasting stations, and it was truly a rainbow event that really kind of, in a celebratory manner, collapsed on its weight. Because you had five thousand people, thousands coming in from the neighborhoods of Oakland. And the museum was just going, "Oh! We have people coming to the museum who have never been here before, eating food they have never had before, and what are we doing with this? People were angry they can't get in before, and more chefs want to come here, and farmers want to come here. And we got food standards, and people just walking around eating, and what is going on?" I think they then called a halt to it because Alice didn't want it to get *bigger*, nor did really anybody at that point.

Reti: To try to move it to a bigger venue.

Scowcroft: Yes. I mean, this is 10,000—no! That wasn't the idea. It was local and community—

Reti: This is sort of like Slow Food now. It's a precursor of that festival.

Scowcroft: Yes. So that was the first time I got to really meet Alice Waters, and got to meet some of these other chefs, and develop lifelong friendships with Mimi and Sally. Izzy and I were already solid, and I'd met Hightower a couple of times, and drew on those networks. Sibella eventually joined our board. It's another moment in time that deserves its own little exploration.

National Organic Farmers Surveys

Reti: Today is January 11, 2008, and I'm here with Bob Scowcroft for our second interview. So, last time we talked quite a bit about the Organic Farming Research Foundation. Let's begin by talking some more about the National Organic Farmers Survey.

Scowcroft: Yes. Well, the very first survey was conducted in 1993, and it did not follow academic protocol for a survey, in part because it was also used as a fundraiser. The active members of the board at the time, in '93, said, "Hey, let's find out what farmers want as priorities of research, and while we're doing it, ask them for some money. We've got these lists from various and sundry areas. Let's put them together and try to write a thousand farmers and see what they want to do for research priorities because we're going to start giving away money outside of CCOF and outside of California." So we sent it out with a business reply envelope and a coupon, and got back a list of priorities and thousands of dollars, saying, "Hey, thanks for asking." (Tens of thousands of dollars, actually.) "Thanks for asking, and here's what I think the priorities ought to be." And "employee number one," Erica Walz, put it together, processed the data, and discovered that weeds were the number one research issue, and then

identified some other corners of the on-farm research reality that the board should fund.

In 1995, 1998, and 2001 we conducted these surveys. We stopped asking for money, thank goodness, when we sent it out, but we were undisciplined in our focus in what we wanted to ask these farmers. The last one had like a thousand fields of data, and narrative responses, and we had a whole night crew coming into the office, UCSC students, hand-entering both the boxes checked or priorities numbered, and the narratives from six or seven hundred farmers that answered fifty questions. I think ten [of the questions] were narratives. It was a mind-boggling group of data. And then Erica—

Reti: Good God!

Scowcroft: "Good God" were not the words we used! (laughter) But Erica processed it all. Weeds were still the number one priority of research, but we went into Farm Bill; we went into policy; we went into size and scope; we went into demographics; we went into labor. It was a phenomenal and unique piece of work that, thanks to Google, is still being cited to this day. It's five years old now, at a minimum, and there's no other data like that anywhere else, although we have our fingers crossed that the institution called the Ag Census, which is part of the USDA, will pick up where we left off. We've been having very private and confidential meetings with the USDA, in a collegial but advocacy way, to say, "Damn it! You're the ag census. Ask organic questions. Ask *these* organic questions *this* way." And I think this time around— Actually, just before I left [the office today] I saw an update on where the Ag Census is on this stuff. So I

think we'll finally get some good questions. And they have the technical expertise; they have the academic expertise, to not ask too many [questions] or get too many fields of data. They don't deal with money.

Reti: It's a massive thing to take on.

Scowcroft: Yes, we actually spent some money and had Washington State University analyze our survey and suggest other approaches to get more strategic questions answered in a statistically, academically sound way. That report is gathering some dust on my desk, and when we get some more staff on board and some of Erica's time, we'll probably do it that way. We want to still have some control over the levers, but we think the Ag Census in general now should be the way to go on this. We originated, by our unique way, an organic farmers survey, and then institutionalized it and advocated for it on the policy side. That's part of our long-term getting fair share of our dollars. If Ag Census has a $100 million dollar budget, then three million of that should be for organic data collection. We've been using that template across the board in every agency.

Scientific Congress of Organic Agriculture Researchers [SCOAR]

Reti: And then there was something I came across called SCOAR.

Scowcroft: Scientific Congress of Organic Ag Researchers. We had two national meetings. It was funded by the Mott Foundation. Actually the Mott Foundation, with a little bit of Farm Aid funds, and Jesse Smith Noyes Foundation, threw in all the money together to create a policy program at OFRF. The design of SCOAR was, and still is, farmers and scientists as peers. One can chuckle at that, but the

idea was to get scientists out of the damn labs, and into the fields, and to see farming as a system. But at the same time get the farmers out of the fields, and into the lab and academia to understand, or get a better sense, of the science that described what they were doing.

Reti: So kind of an agroecological approach?

Scowcroft: Organic agricultural ecological. It's the early thrust into systems research, but the hierarchy of—scientists know all and farmers are just there to give their fields—still is pretty much the way most, even organic research, is happening. What we wanted was for the farmers to say, "Well, not only do I have the field, but I want *this* research done. I'm observing that I went and planted my soybeans a lot closer together. Then I planted this purple vetch afterwards as a cover crop. And the next year I got more soybeans. My neighbor stumbled into it, so then I did it intentionally. But I have no idea whether it was the vetch or the canopy of the soybeans closer together, or both, or neither, or the rain, or the lack of rain? All I know is I got a better yield, so I'm trying it on more acres next year. Would you come and tell me the science of why this is working?" And the scientist is like, "Oh, wait a minute, wait a minute! I have no idea how to replicate that in a test plot. Let me think about it. And come into my lab and look at this other data on how I did this and see if that might work for you. If I'm going to publish this, and we're going to get this out there in general, this is how I've got to prepare this experiment."

So we had these meetings. We had poster boards and farmer narratives. And in some of the areas they morphed into advisory boards for local land grants. In

other areas, they morphed into scientists bailing entirely and starting to farm, saying, "You know, actually I was meant to be a farmer. I can't stand this. I gotta get out of here. (laughs) You're right. I've got to get out of the lab. I'm going to be a farmer-scientist with a Ph.D., but I've got to plant a crop every year. This is really what I'm meant to do."

There's a small steering committee. It's relatively inactive. But the list is getting stronger and growing. We probably have 1500 people on the email list. The current primary activity of SCOAR is to send an email alert out every two months with new science, new papers, new farmers [such as]—Louisiana State is calling for an advisory committee in its region, or asking other farmer-scientist collaborations to communicate with "Joe Smith" on how they did it. So that's going out every two months.

Reti: This is a national project.

Scowcroft: Yes. So what we're doing is, in some ways we're finding new grad students through the web page. It could lead to the third national organic farmer-scientist congress, but we haven't pulled the trigger on that concept yet, in '09. We are talking about planning for something like that in '08. But to some extent it may not be necessary, because now so many scientists are getting it. It ain't the nineties anymore. They know if they want to be validated in the field they've got to have organic farmers as advisors and participants in their research. They did not know that fifteen years ago.

Reti: When do you think that that realization started to become more common?

Scowcroft: Great question. More common is a regional—you know, sort of WSU, Oregon State, Agro— That was kind of how it started to be done. It was intuitive, if not by demand, thanks to the strong certification groups. In other areas it was more grudging: [Scowcroft imitates whining voice] "Oh, God. Okay. I'll get a couple of farmers on the proposal. My development department said I had to. But I really just want their land, and then [for them to] get out of the way."

You know, you might tag the arrival of the integrated organic program monies to the first research monies that came out of the last Farm Bill. The requirement for applications was to some extent written by OFRF, both in the law itself and in using what we learned from SCOAR. So if you want federal $600,000 from the integrated organic program for your massive research project, you have to identify who the farmers are, and why their ideas are applicable and practical to the farmers relative to the topic you want to study. So far, all the decision-making bodies of the advisory board that grant the integrated organic program money have included OFRF board members, or SCOAR leaders, or both. The federal money going out has an organic advisory board as a requirement. And that has been upheld, with a few exceptions, remarkably well.

So three or four years later, if you want to go to the feds to get your big grant, like [UCSC postdoctoral researcher] Joji Muramoto got, and [Steve] Gliessman and some of the others— To them it's pretty much second nature. They're already thinking this way. But when University of Nebraska came in there was a lot of angst, because Nebraska has no statewide indigenous organic culture. So when University of Nebraska came in to do some ag work they had to go find

some organic farmers. Then they discovered when they found them that they weren't going to sit back and just be names on the paper. They were gung ho. If you want to do it, you've got to rewrite it this way and do it this way.

Congressional Organic Caucus

Reti: That's all very exciting. So let's talk about the Congressional Organic Caucus.

Scowcroft: My idea. I'll take that one on as my own. I was at a conference and watched the Wine Institute do a presentation. I was drinking some wine and sitting back, and then there was the executive director talking about the Wine Caucus. I said, "What, a wine caucus?" He said, "A majority of the members of the House of Representatives are members of the Wine Caucus." And I thought, well, I'm going back to our office and saying, let's start an Organic Caucus. If you know about the Hill, caucuses are more than a dime a dozen but less than a dollar a dozen. There are lots of caucuses. The Women's Caucus. The most famous one is the Congressional Black Caucus. There's a Cigar Caucus. There's a parliamentary framework for you to declare a caucus and get people to cosign their intent to be a part of that. There's no real money behind it, per se, but as a caucus you can then submit to the Sergeant of Arms for the use of the House Ag Committee meeting room, for example, easier than Bob can submit for a meeting in the House Ag Committee room. (laughs)

Brise Tencer was on board then, and I said to Brise in particular, and then Mark [Lipson], "Hey, we're just beating our heads against the wall. Let's get an Organic Caucus going." They said, "That's a damn good idea. Let's just go do it."

So we did, but my charge to them as staff was that it had to be an "organic ark." They had to march into the caucus two by two. The co-chairs had to be one Republican and one Democrat, and ideally we want three Republicans and three Democrats before we circulated a co-signing letter to people who want to say, "Yes, I want to join the Organic Caucus. Put my name on it to the Sergeant of Arms." Because I was very concerned that what may be personally are our best friends in the Kucinich, Barbara Lee political world, and we are very passionate personal supporters of, but if those two were the co-signers and just sent around a letter it would be just, "Oh, it's another one of those Democratic back benchers coming up with a hippie idea." I wanted it to come out to say, "Jack Welch and Sam Farr, as a Republican and a Democrat, are taking the lead and looking—" Welch would go out and find two more, and Sam would go out and find two more. It took us a while to do that and we did it. With six founding members we sent out a "dear colleague" letter and got it up to about thirty-nine or forty members, of which I think eleven were Republicans.

That set off the unintended consequences in one or two other areas. The Organic Trade Association went ballistic. How dare you do any kind of political activity? That was an unexpected response and I'm going to have to wait a couple of more years before I actually flesh out how ridiculous the emails got, and confrontational, and a profound waste of time on politically covering a flank I had no idea would even exist. But suffice it to say that happened. And a few other groups were like, "Well, what about us? We're organic. Are they going to speak for us?" And the outer circle, the enviros and the more professional consumer groups were like, "Man, what a great idea! It's about time. And you've

got Republicans? We'll get people to sign up as well." Then it got out of hand. Everybody thought they owned part of it, and all we wanted to do was to have an organic caucus that would speak for (and listen to) the family farmer. That was the original intent, relative to appropriations and the first Farm Bill.

Reti: Did that happen?

Scowcroft: We've held four or five Organic Caucus briefings. The Trade Association continues to treat it as a very sore point. Brise, who was the staffer that really put an incredible amount of work in on it and all her fingerprints on it, left OFRF for another job so we had a gap in relationships there too. I think five or six of the eleven Republicans lost in the last sweep. They were moderates. And then in this Farm Bill another rep has alienated his colleagues so dramatically in the sustainable-ag world that we've actually let this lie with "cover crops on it" while we figure out what to do next. We have a new relationship with a new director of the Organic Trade Association and a new board, and she understands the Hill and speaks the Hill. We've all been involved with the Farm Bill, and only have so many resources, and have got to figure out how to keep the chairpersonship balanced. That one everyone's bought into, which is really good.

Reti: Having one Republican and one Democrat?

Scowcroft: Yes. Bi-partisan.

Reti: So Sam Farr is still chair?

Scowcroft: He would be listed as a co-chair, yes. Sam's our hero.

There is low-level back scatter about what to do next, and a couple of the staff of the original staff, Hill staff, are sending out things saying, "Hey everybody, here are some things for your interest." So it's lying dormant until we develop a new, more integrated plan. It's really clear. Nobody else picked it up. Organic Trade Association didn't do anything. So we're really going to have to decide ourselves how we want to recalibrate that and reintegrate it. But it was very exciting, and it was really helpful a couple of times. There's nothing better than sending around a bipartisan letter on a couple of these topics in an environment where there's almost no other bipartisan activity right now. And the press: "You have Republicans? I thought it was [all Democrats]." "No, go our website and look at the list."[26]

So that one I got credit for and I also got slammed for, because I got credit for it. It's all in a day in the political mud baths.

Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement

Reti: Okay, let's talk about some of the other questions on this list. How has OFRF been involved in the Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement?

Scowcroft: We're not organizationally too focused on that. There's only so much policy work we can do. Actually, I should say that in our Organic Farmers Action Network, it's almost been entirely been Farm Bill, and amendment this and that. We did send out an OFAN [Organic Farmers Action Network] alert on the Leafy Greens Agreement. It's, if not the first, one of the first electronic

national broadcasts (our list is 1500, maybe) that we've done *not* on the Farm Bill. There we just pointed out that the testimony deadline was this, and that Tom Willey and Judith Redmond wrote pretty fantastic pieces and here's the links to them[27] on why one rule does not catch all, and left it at that.

The closing framework around that is that I'd say it's a surprise to almost all of us that the thermonuclear, one-shot-solves-all approach still gathers momentum, never mind becomes the way to farm. (laughs) I mean, you just want to hit yourself in the side of the head sometimes.[28]

Another one is the National Animal Identification System. That is very similar. It's the response to Bird Flu. Every chicken in the U.S. will have a microchip. *Every chicken*. Every hog. Every cow. (laughs) You just think somebody must have thought this up in a bomb shelter from the 1950s, because they haven't looked out into eight million backyard chicken coops and how fast they can come and go, and the cost, and the data entry. Who is going to register every chip? It's mind-boggling. And that's similar to what they are talking about in the leafy greens agreement, really. Sterilize every bit of area around your lettuce field and build ten-foot fences. And I suppose they're going to want entire fields covered with screens that will be so narrow that bird droppings won't get through them. I mean, you really want to laugh. And of course humans being the carriers of a lot of this, or the water, or the packing shed— You can't believe that it even got this far. And I wouldn't be surprised if it gets somehow approved.

The last year is the scariest year of the four, and twice as much in an eight-year administration, because all of the most far-out rules and ideas of the political

technocrats get posted in the *Federal Register* with ten days comment. You watch what starts happening this summer and fall. I mean, you already (if you read between the lines you noticed this), [have] the polar bear being listed as a threatened species—years of science, everything that had been done and was due in January was stopped in its tracks. It's because they're going to drill in a whole new area of Alaska. And somebody put the dots together that if they have a threatened species there they have to do at least a year's more worth of work, which puts them into January '09. That's just an early signpost of what you're going to see in enviro and ag and parks and many of the other areas. Commerce. It's going to be really scary, the next six to nine months. After they've looted most of the treasury, now they're going to loot the regulations. We're trying to figure out how to be vigilant about stuff that we care about, and leafy greens is just one of many tracks.

Farm Bill of 2007

Reti: So let's talk about the current political climate and the Farm Bill of 2007. You've just emerged from that battle.

Scowcroft: Well, organic got victory after victory. It's, I think, due to our professionalism, and a few folks' longer-range vision. This is OFRF's second Farm Bill. So it's ten years. I actually saw Mark [Lipson] start to write something about the third Farm Bill and I just said—"No, no, no. (laughter) Give me a couple of months." But there are others that are saying, "Okay, next Farm Bill we're going to do this—" Those things are already flying around. You look at it

as a twenty-five year march, a thirty-year march, to try to get where you want to get.

In this Farm Bill we've created the spaces for almost all of the organic needs we can see right now. And then it will be both funding and staffing and implementation of those. I think, for one example, there is some hope (now why, I don't know), but some hope that with the National Organic Program having their budget doubled, and new political appointees in '09, that there'll be a steady stream of pasture regulations, and accreditation visit protocol, and farm plan frameworks that have been now ten years in the waiting, just out of the National Organic Program. It's been, "We don't have money and we're not going to do that. And the attorneys said if we even did we wouldn't write it that way anyways," ever since the rules were agreed upon. A lot of that is political gamesmanship by the other side that also sees this as a thirty-year march and will stop organic by any means necessary.

I feel really good about the overall framework right now, and know that there are a lot of organic advocates within the career closets of the USDA ready to come out and get rockin' on this. OFRF, again, got the idea and we have helped facilitate an interagency organic working group that is just government staff. Some are our buddies that left the NGO world and went to work for the government, but others have really come on board. They try to meet every month or every two months, about ten or twelve. Then when Mark, or Jonathan, or I go back we're kind of a draw, and maybe twenty-five or thirty will come. It's largely on your own staff time.

There isn't agency or section support for this, and no funding for this in a big way. But it originally started under [President] Clinton where number two was Richard Rominger. Rominger was the Deputy Secretary of the USDA, and we used our personal relationships with him and his son. And Kathleen Merrigan particularly at that time was critical. Tom Pavich (president of OFRF at that time), and I, and Kathleen, who was on our board, and Rominger called the entire USDA leadership into a room and Rominger said, "You will make organic part of your programs, and these are the three most important people you need to hear to start this." That was a profound meeting. That was an amazing morning. When you call the director of AMS [Agricultural Marketing Service], or ARS [Agricultural Research Service], or Ag Census, Risk Management, and on and on, they always come with one or two other staffers. It's entourage city. I think we had eighteen out of the twenty, whatever the number is, directors in the room, with Rominger in the middle. Then there was an outer wall with forty other people behind it taking notes and transcribing. And Tom and Kathleen and I just did— I think we had slideshows back then.

Reti: (laughter) No PowerPoint.

Scowcroft: No. And presentations. And Tom Pavich and his brother Steve at that time, they were running three thousand organic acres. Most of the people in the room had never even conceived of organic being three thousand acres. That was a really cool moment. It set the stage that it was safe for agencies— Now, some of them went back to their offices and said, "Oh, yeah. The heck with that. (laughs) I had to go to the meeting, but organic is bogus. Maybe there are a couple of

things— But it's all California, though, obviously. It's never going to happen in this area here in Missouri or in Iowa, God forbid." But it did. That was how that started.

Reti: So that was the beginning of what you have been able to accomplish now.

Scowcroft: Yes, we're originators. We are entrepreneurs and originators, and then look to delegate and coordinate and redirect, if need be.

And then part of it is just kind of organic. It takes off. Cathy Greene is one of our heroes at Economic Research Service. And Jill Auburn, who is now the director of Sustainable Ag Research and Education Program, the SARE program, Jill was a founding OFRF member before she went into government. Jill and Cathy are sort of the central—"Okay, they're coming to town," or, "It's really time for another organic meeting." Now there's Tom Bewick at ARS. There is a core group of people who really get it and are now working to find the right balance. The fair share, that's been my mantra. We've tried other terminology, but Mark [Lipson] and others have finally been like, okay, it doesn't really feel good, but if you're looking at the thirty-year march, just pounding that drum of getting three percent of a billion-dollar budget annually is a good— Someday we might see that. So that's what we've been working on. As Cathy Greene comes up with economic data, then she can turn around and say, "Well, gee, six percent of all the carrots in the U.S. are certified organic, but the marketing order (well, I don't know if there is a carrot marketing order) has nothing in there for organic."

Marketing Orders and Organic Farming Research

And then we can turn around and go to the marketing order and say, "USDA official publications—not just OFRF or some radical NGOs out there, your own government body that has tens of people crunching carrot numbers over this—has come up and discovered that six percent of the carrots are organic. So, hey, marketing order. And we want organic carrot ads. Or, we want organic carrot research."

We're not as strategic about it as we would like to be, and it's a collective source of frustration, I think. But this year we feel like we're actually, to some extent, able to look forward, rather than to continually catch up or follow our tail in a circle. So we're just starting to mess with some of the marketing orders right now, and drilling into those. Do you know what a marketing order is?

Reti: I was just going to ask you that, partly for the sake of the reader of this oral history.

Scowcroft: There are many different types of them, but simplistically, a bunch of apple growers get together and say, "We're producing so many apples we're all going to go bankrupt. We should have a marketing order that says only eighty percent can be sold fresh because that seems like what the supermarkets—" (It's a little bit of a socialistic environment.) "And the other twenty percent have to be in juice or dumped back in the field." The most famous one of those is the raisin marketing order. They're all about how many raisins are held off the market every year. Some years—

Reti: Because then the price goes down, basically.

Scowcroft: Yes, we all produce so much. And I'm like, "Oh, man, Mark is selling his for a buck. I'd better do ninety [cents]. And Mark sees me do ninety and the buyers all ran over to ninety." He says, "I better do eighty-eight. Because I can't store it for a year.'" Almonds, a lot of those have quantities of sales—forty-nine million tons will be sold this year. That kind of thing. They don't fix prices as much as they fix quantities available.

Reti: So if you're a small organic farmer of apples, how is this actually implemented?

Scowcroft: Well, it's different. Raisins affect everybody. You have an acre and you think, "Oh, this is so cool. I'm just going to dry those grapes on my Corralitos property." They hunt and peck and find you and say, "You can only sell half of those this year. You've got an acre. That means we think you have five hundred pounds. And first of all, you've got to pay the box tax so we can keep our marketing order going so we can come out and spy on you. And then we're going to check your invoices and your billing receipts. And if you sell any more you're going to have to pay a penalty."

Reti: And this is the USDA that's enforcing this?

Scowcroft: Well, it's staff. It's one of those 1930s frameworks that is Byzantine. So there's the California Raisin Marketing Board. That has staff. And they have the force of law behind them. But they're not USDA employees. They're Raisin Marketing Board employees.

Reti: So when you hear about the Strawberry Commission, that would be an example of this kind of thing?

Scowcroft: Exactly. But others are like, "Sell as much as you want. We've all just realized nobody's ever given a hoot about raisins, so we're going to put all our money into raisin research." The Viticulture Wine Grape Commission collects a box tax. And that's a marketing order. But almost all of their monies goes into research. The voters got together and voted themselves a marketing order and defined it. In Florida there's just a Florida Tomato Marketing Order. And that's about what size and color it will be when it leaves the farm. So if you've get a whole lot of rain, and you've got one this big [holds hands wide] and it bolts on you, you can't sell it. Because Florida is so productive, there would just be a billion zillion tomatoes. (I can't wait to see what that reads like, a billion zillion tomatoes.) (laughter)

Reti: (laughter)

Scowcroft: So these marketing orders, there are four to five hundred of them. And they are visual: No scars [allowed on the fruit]. They are research. They are quantity. Some might have price frameworks, but I haven't looked at them that closely.

So switching back to us [OFRF], for all of those that have research components, we're going in there sort of one at a time, saying, "You need to do some organic research. We're speaking on behalf of organic farmers. We're organized."

Reti: So that's the tie-in, is to use those marketing orders as an in-road for organic research.

Scowcroft: Right. But if they are promotion, the trade should be going to those saying, "Hey, we can only do so much as an Organic Trade Association. We should have dancing organic grapes, or really cute organic kiwis."

Reti: Right, so the promotional money needs to be spent fairly—

Scowcroft: With a fair share as well.

Reti: Yes, the fair-share argument.

Scowcroft: So it's pretty cool, and it's pretty way under the radar except for this recording. We're not yet strategic about it, but we are trying to educate others, particularly in the policy world, that this is an area of interest. It's a low-hanging fruit. We think we can have an impact very quickly by pointing out to some of these marketing orders that they're not providing a fair share of their resources to organic. They don't really like to see their names in the paper, that they're not providing resources to their own members. Particularly, they don't like to see it in their own newsletters to their own members. (laughs) So that's all fair. So that's another thing we have going on. But it's very spotty.

Reti: Okay. Are there other OFRF projects that you'd like to talk about?

State of the States: Organic Systems Research at Land Grant Institutions

Scowcroft: Well, the *State of the States* report that Jane Sooby works on. That's yet another— A lot of these are information-gathering reports with policy overlaps. Just gathering the information has affected change. We monitor all sixty-eight land grant colleges in the U.S., [and colleges] called "The 1890s." The 1890s are all the Black A&M's [Agricultural and Mechanical] that were formed in the South in the middle of the Jim Crow era. There might be just eight or ten more of those. UC Santa Cruz is not a land grant [college]. UC Berkeley is, which is kind of hard to visualize, as is UC Riverside and UC Davis. We have three land grant universities in this state.

So we monitor all the land grants. They were founded in the 1860s, chartered after the Civil War to get land (they were giving it away around the country), and conduct research and share information for the benefit of the agrarian population of the United States. (Because that's what we were then.) For all farmers. This is your university job. Study it, science research, field days—respond to your consumer's needs. Most people would argue that that intent is long, long gone, and we are responding to the multinational corporations' needs, by and large, who have leveraged and are using the people's tax dollars to do this. So what we decided to do was to start analyzing every land grant in the U.S. and provide a report on the state of the states' land grants for organic pertinence.

That was a derivative of Mark Lipson's report, *Searching for the O-Word*.[29] He did that. That's what created the policy program. The USDA had just gone electronic,

and we looked through the current research information systems for organic-pertinent projects (this is the *Searching for the O- Word* paper) and there were thirty thousand papers. And we again had another night crew come in, and just break them out, and look at a hundred at a time, and run keywords (we had seventy key words through those), by hand. And after we were done, we found thirty-two organic research papers out of the thirty thousand. We found another hundred-plus that were pertinent, but not considered organic positive. That was the basic, and remains the basic underpinning for the fair share [concept]. We should have had three hundred organic papers, not thirty. And for years I got laughs, until finally some people told me they'd heard me say that six times so I took my paragraph out. I said that the USDA was shocked that they had even thirty organic research projects out of thirty thousand.

Reti: (laughs)

Scowcroft: (laughs) It was like, "Who funded those? What are they doing here?" That was the tone and the tenor of the time. There were folks there who said, "We shouldn't be funding those. How did they—"

Reti: "How did those get through?"

Scowcroft: "How did these get through? Who did these? Where did that money come from?" We had estimates on money and acreage and all that. So, as a few land grants begin to throw a couple of organic sods of grass into our domain, we decided to start monitoring them. We were particularly interested in using acreage as a measurement. The USDA still really has no person, clue, or paper on

how many land grant research acres are either owned or leased by researchers in the United States. Nobody has gathered that information. Nobody has just called them and added it up. Jane Sooby found a paper where this grad student tried to do that, and the best he could figure was maybe 900,000 acres. But he had asterisks all around it: "Don't judge my career on—"

Reti: Now, these acres are for general agricultural research, not specifically for organic farming research?

Scowcroft: Just for agricultural research in general. A bit less than 900,000 acres in the United States for research. And we found 150 were certified organic. And again, as we were agitating upwards, we had just begun requiring that in our own grant program. There weren't that much, so we had that as a suggestion, not a requirement, that when you get a grant from OFRF that the acreage be certified that you are using, managed in an organic certification environment. Now it's mandatory. Or, tell us why not. But none of the land grants could even apply to us because there was no organic research acreage out there. There were 150 certified organic [research] acres in the United States, out of 900,000. And 100 of the 150 was one farm in Minnesota. California had one acre. And that was in transition.

Reti: And you wouldn't count the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems at UCSC, because UCSC is not a land grant college?

Scowcroft: That's right. Yes, we did put a piece on that (we had a lot of "see notes") to say, well, these environmentalists have certified organic acreage. But

we acknowledged that in the whole academic system they're not considered valid, or a land grant university with what they do there, because it's environmental, not agricultural.

So that made a lot of news. And that, too, has been cited many times in congressional testimony on the floor of the House, and by caucus members. (Hundreds in academia and the media.)

We did a second report a couple of years later, and we found that there are 450 acres certified, and about 1000 in transition. We're just starting to work on the third one right now. That has more policy implications, but in a way it's a directory. It was really cool. I went into this meeting with [U.S. Senator] Saxby Chambliss [R-Georgia], who was at the time the chair of the Senate Agricultural Committee when the Republicans were in control—went into his office with his senior staff. The good news is we had this meeting and they were going to hear us, even though there was no organic acreage really in Georgia. But okay, you guys have got suits on so you can come in. And the staffers, well, one was from Purdue and the other one was from Michigan. And we're talking about Georgia, there's one peanut farmer, and you should really just— This is not controversial and there are more Republican organic farmers than Democrats. And let's just get that partisanship off the table. And here's the survey. Here's all this stuff. And they both go, at the same time, to get the *State of the States* report to see what their alma maters were doing about organic.

Reti: Oh, really? They were using it.

Scowcroft: These were the guys who were writing up the notes. These are the legislative assistants or senior staff. And one guy is going, "Purdue. Nothing! Zero." And the other one, "Michigan. Hey, I've got five papers and these many acres." It was great. They were dissing each other. "Well, five acres! That's going to do a lot for Michigan cherry growers. Hah-hah-hah." So just that anecdotal, watching them go see what their states were doing, was pretty cool.

And now we're expanding the criteria of what we're looking for at the land grants. Do they have a farmer advisory board? There was one woman who blew me away. I was at Washington State University and she came through the crowd in the little reception after my talk, because they have an incredible organic program there. She said, "You changed my life. I knew I was born to do organic systems research and I got *State of the States*. You guys sent it to me for free and it came right away. I've dog-eared it. I went to ten of the universities because I needed to get it right the first time, and I did a six-month tour and interviews and then I came here. It said that right in here. I should have— But I went to these other ones that you'd identified, and this is the most important paper that I've looked at in the last three years. This gave me the direction and information I needed to go check out where I wanted to get my Ph.D. from."

Reti: Oh, that's great.

Scowcroft: I was like, oh wow. I never thought of this being a resource for the prospective master's or Ph.D. student. Because in general, organic academic research is a pretty small thread out there. Yet this is really the only place you can go to see who is publishing what and where, who is tenured, and what the

university commitment is to it, and whether they have an actual organic farm on site. Because this generation of researchers knows that you have to conduct your research in an organic system. You can't use a university one hundred acres that just had GMO research last year and is going to have herbicides research next year. That means it's not being managed in any way, shape, or form. You've got to have it managed organically before you even start. And that's what makes (for the purposes of this interview) UCSC so profoundly important. It's because essentially it has—I don't know if there's core data collection, but it essentially has thirty years of soil management as if organic mattered, and there's probably a lot of notebooks and raw data on when the cover crops went down and what they used. Somebody could just come in and review those for an optimum scientific application of a management plan. As if science mattered, not necessarily yield, or your local marketplace. It's one of the few places in the country—that and the Rodale Institute, that has that kind of history and length of time.

Visions for the Future of the Organic Farming Research Foundation

Reti: So what other kinds of visions do you have for OFRF for the future?

Scowcroft: Mine are focused on generational change, Gen O—Generation Organic. Training new leaders. Work-study students. Hands-on training in risk-taking, both political and fundraising and science, as staff. Institutionalizing board excellence. We're well on the way to that. We're in our seventh generation of the board. The first two or three were, "Hey Bob, who do you want? We're not even sure what we're doing here, never mind what the board is supposed to do."

But now we have nominating committees, and long-range planning, and they're all doing it all on their own. They give us a chance to comment. I think maybe twice in eighteen years I've said, "Oh, no, no. You only saw the person on paper. I've seen them in action. This would not be a good fit." And if they voted that person on, that still would have been the way it is. I'm not a voting member.

A very active advisory board. We want to bring in more intelligence, more expertise. It could be one of the paths to get on the board, is to be on our advisory board first and parachute into a committee meeting, or review very specific papers, or just get off a Senior Senate Ag committee staff and come in and be on our advisory board as a policy assistant kind of thing.

An endowment fund. That's the last [goal]. In this strategic plan we just got the last hole filled with a communications director position. So that's everything we were supposed to do in the last five years.

The next generation of conversation will be around a formal D.C. office, or Iowa office, a rural Vermont office, or a Montana office, a Louisiana office, or a New Mexico office—to basically take professional staff and begin to plant them in eco-regions, eco-farming regions around the country, and agitate under all the objectives in the national organization. We have a policy fellow in D.C. now. He can almost run the entire policy program, eight months into it. He's in his twenties. We have two staff in the office that are in their twenties that are professional grassroots organizers, and a development staff person. In three years she could raise a million to two million on her own, she's so skilled. We want to nurture the next generation of staff. So that's my departing framework.

And then after disengagement, I know I want to stir it up in an even bigger way somewhere, but I don't know how yet. I'm leaving that as a player to be named later. I feel very strongly about founder's syndrome. I was influenced by David Brower's utter inability to disengage from Friends of the Earth. He just couldn't let go, and as other people were trying to come on and trying to be directors, there were any number of maneuvers that, for his own—whatever, gratification or passion or both—accelerated the bankruptcy that Friends of the Earth eventually went into. I don't think I have those qualities, but I don't want to test it.

I've been doing this eighteen years, just OFRF. Twenty-nine years for organic. So I see the elegant return to the shadows, and then we'll see. I have amazing contacts on the Hill, and in Washington and in the press. No reason, necessarily, to let those go by, but I don't know if I want to try to stop the permanent war machine and overthrow the military industrial complex, or reformat our entire national housing coalition perspective, or, after a couple of years just be a hired gun for radical organic groups that want to start up. No idea. No intentional plan.

Non-governmental Organizations

Reti: And you are also on some NGOs, I understand.

Scowcroft: I'm not on any boards, but a whole lot of groups, directors, or boards discreetly appear in my office asking for either just kind of public assistance, or very private [advice]—what do I do with this problem or that person? There's an

expanding time investment in consultation, if you will, bordering on humorously therapeutic for some. (laughter)

I am pretty opinionated on the state of NGOs in California, which is miserable, and I haven't had the time to do anything more than wave my arms around on why I think it's miserable. I've done even less on suggesting ways to make it better. But particularly in California, (Oregon and Washington are pretty together), Arizona, and in Nevada, we do not have a professional cadre of young nonprofit organizations, either in leadership or in membership. It's to some extent personally embarrassing, never mind of national concern. Everybody looks out there and says, "What's going on in California? That person just quit or that person just— The leader just moved to Oregon overnight. And that's the ninth executive director I've met from this group. Why can't you people ever get it together?" Probably the only cool thing out of that is that somewhere in the same breath is, "You guys [OFRF] are so *amazingly* together." And I think, as compared to the debris and incompetence around us? (laughs)

So at some points I'm kind of high and hopeful with two groups, and then disgusted with three others. And then one of those two groups has a meltdown and I'm just, oh my God, not again. And then another of the three I'm disgusted with finally addresses something and I think, well, maybe there's some hope over there. I'd say, at least since the late 1980s, we've had little to be proud of as a collective group of NGOs in the state that work on sustainable and organic ag. Very little. Mini bursts of brilliance and activity only to find, oh, well that's

actually a fireball. (laughter) I thought that was the really bright light of the future and instead, whoo! Stay away from that one.

Sustainable Agriculture in the Central Coast Region of California

Reti: Well, on the positive side, doing this documentary project on the history of organic farming on the Central Coast of California, it's remarkable to me just how many organizations have come out of Santa Cruz in particular, and how many farmers there are. I am interested in your personal take on why this is so. What is it about this area that has made this possible?

Scowcroft: Well, I think it all came from UCSC. I mean, there was nothing else here before then. Maybe Barney Bricmont and CCOF sitting at his kitchen table. But Barney and CCOF—he was the only one who would do it, and he was halfway between the anarchists of Mendocino and the revolutionaries of Santa Barbara, who saw things entirely differently in their regional perspective of how things were supposed to go with organic. And halfway from out into the valley of Fresno and Butte County, who said, "A pox on both your houses of wild radical groups of people on the coast." But Barney didn't grow it. He just kind of barely managed it for nine years. UCSC was annually spinning out farmers, policy types occasionally, of course Mark [Lipson] being the number-one policy graduate from the [Environmental Studies] program. But I'm sure there are others. Patricia [Allen] is now running the show there.[30] And having the Ecological Farming Association move from Davis down to Asilomar for their conferences, and then having a two-person office. That's where some of my hopes are. EFA has got a new director. They've got some grants. And they are

starting to sort out, what do we want to be when we grow outside of this massive annual conference. They have some money to do it. So I'm hoping Tim [Sullivan] will use his expertise. He doesn't have any baggage from California. They brought him in from Minnesota. He's worked on the Mississippi River water coalition. That's hopeful to me, because we're an incestuous bunch, to some extent, as well.

We've been hiring UCSC students out of either the Farm and Garden or the Environmental Studies Department. Our office managers and other people who have come through the office, if I think about it, four or five of the ten came from UCSC one way or another. Don Burgett, the development director, stayed three years at the UCSC Farm. He somehow pulled off beyond the second year and became a third-year [apprentice], or whatever he did then. Becky came out of environmental studies; Melissa came out of environmental studies; Julie Chamberlain came out of environmental studies. Becky is farming here now.

[Santa Cruz] is a beautiful place. It has found its own balance of ag and urban, even though both are really expensive. But it's still happening. There are eight to ten thousand acres in agriculture within thirty miles of Santa Cruz. And the conferences. And now there are foodies here, and restaurants here, and a lot of folks who come out. [Organic caterers] Feel Good Foods. Amy [Linstrom] came out of the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems and started a catering business. She and Heidi now have the River Street Cafe and they have ten employees. A couple of the women who make bread for them came out of the

Farm and Garden. (laughs) I mean, it's either a statement that none of us can get it together anywhere else, and we're stuck—

Reti: (laughter) Behind the Rainbow Curtain, as a friend of mine once said.

Scowcroft: (laughs) Right. Oh, yeah. Kansas? This is not Kansas. (laughs) But it's also, we've created now a vast range of opportunities for organic practitioners. You can be a researcher; you can be an NGO staff; you can be an advocate; you can be a farmer; you can be a farm laborer; you can be an economist; you can be a reference librarian. You can come out of the five or six groups here and be whatever you want to be. And in many cases, it will allow you to stay here as well. I mean, many spin out, for all their own reasons, elsewhere. But our roots are pretty deep now. Twenty years is a pretty long time for a professional activity. Eco-Farm—they hire two or three people just to work three months. And a couple of students will jump into that and go, "Whoa, so this is running a conference. I don't want to do that. I do want to farm." Or, "Hey, I hear there is a job opening at CCOF in certification. I think I'll jump over there and work full time."

I would propose that the thirty or forty [years] (depending on your point of view) of Agroecology, the Farm and Garden, and the more recent relationships with environmental studies and College Eight (I don't see them as historic as some others may)—this is the training ground the rest of us now take advantage of. And what's unfortunate (with a small u) is that that is not fully grokked up there [at UCSC] right now. It's still really difficult to get people off the hill, from Agroecology to College Eight.

Reti: Off the hill to come and work in the community?

Scowcroft: Meetings. Hands-on. Get dirty. Come on down. Or facilitate or start them. Patricia [Allen] and I go way back, so we can pick up a thread real easily. But she's not yet in a position, I think (kind of having a little sense of how it works up there and all she has to do), she doesn't necessarily have time to say, "Hey, let's go hang out for an hour every month to see what's happening in the 'real world.' What businesses are starting? What jobs and organic ingredients are available? What's going on with New Leaf?" I mean, there's another whole thing. The whole history of New Leaf is part of this.[31] There are kids in there that are just doing the counters saying, "Well, okay. Can't deal with the real world. I graduated from UCSC. I'll be a clerk and surf for a while." And a percentage of them get interested in food, or some other environmental activity. Or oceans, now. We're going to see a lot more of that, as that money really builds up around Long Marine Laboratory and the Monterey Bay Aquarium. But I think it's the Farm and Garden.

A League of Sustainable Agriculture Voters

Reti: Okay. I came across something where you wrote that you had an idea to start a League of Sustainable Agriculture Voters. I was intrigued by that.

Scowcroft: There's no Political Action Committee [PAC] in our world. I've toyed with that. I've had a brief experience with that with Friends of the Earth in 1984, and found it pretty repulsive. I just don't know if I can deal with that kind of, either personally or could yet professionally support the— It's like trading in political porn. I mean, it's just bodies, numbers, "You're not maxed out yet, and

I'm going to get you if you don't put in $2300." Screaming. It's PACs. And now they have so many derivatives, the 529s and some of these issue-related things. So that was an idea. That may still be out in the hinterland for something to do when I'm sixty-eight, start a national organic PAC.

Reti: So that's what you meant by a league?

Scowcroft: No, this is the flip side of it, is to use the League of Conservation Voters approach and have a League of Sustainable Ag Voters. More recently, I think I'd call it a League of Sustainable Eaters or Organic Eaters, and riff off a lot of [Michael] Pollan's stuff.[32] Something like that. So then it's just a replication of business as usual. You do ten votes on your report card and you say, "Mark got a C-minus and Bob got a D, and Jane got an A-plus, because of the Eater's Manifesto." Then you circulate that in key races. So. I have too many ideas sometimes. But that's what I was thinking about that.

Reti: I could imagine a debate where the candidates had to talk about these issues.

Scowcroft: Well, for example, in the last election there was a race in Western Nebraska by this guy who has got seven terms under his belt. He doesn't even really go out in the grassroots anymore. He's supported by the Club for Growth, which is a no-government, end-all-taxes [organization]. This kid who grew up there, went to Yale, graduated and came back home, had been working on the parents' ranch, said, "Oh, the hell with it. I'm gonna run against him." Every Democrat that's ever tried to do it has lost seventy to thirty. So he had enough

money to hire one person. And that person tracked me down at night at home (because I don't do any political stuff at work), and said, "Hey, I'm the campaign manager and he wants to talk about sustainable ag. Could you help me out?" So I did a little bit, and then kind of looked at the cliff and said, "I don't want to jump off this. I can't do any more. Good luck." But I kept watching the race. And they raised a little more money and he hired a second staffer. And then he did one ad and said, "The single largest donor for issue and PAC is the Club for Growth. They gave him four hundred thousand dollars over his last seven terms, and the Club for Growth is to end government. So all subsidies will be over here in your district. They're paying for him to tell you that you're not getting a single penny ever again, because there will be no government USDA."

And it [snaps fingers] it hit. So then it went from seventy-thirty, to sixty-five-thirty-five. Sixty-forty. Fifty-five-forty-five. And with the whole "throw out the Republicans movement," this guy was really on the defensive. But he couldn't ask Club for Growth for any more money. (laughs) And he had really lost touch with others. So he was short of money, and they were pouring in, and you know, Howard Dean, and they had started giving Democratic money in the district. And actually that probably wasn't a great idea because then he had: "The Democrats are trying to take over. Our guns and our women won't be able to—" You know, all the icky stuff that is around politics. But he [the challenger] really talked a lot about— We gave him a lot of papers about sustainability, and particularly in organic, because soybeans were seventeen dollars a bushel (this was before ethanol hit), and corn was six dollars a bushel and he was saying, "I don't want to be controversial here, but who here in the audience wouldn't take

seventeen dollars a bushel for their soybeans? And he's against organic. As a matter of fact, he's not even for a favor for sustainable ag. He thinks there should be no regulations, that you should plant corn every year, and you know how the soil blows away when you do that."

That would have been a great place to not have the Democrats and to have a League of Sustainable Eaters. These kind of PACs. You can set up a Local 529 that just says, "We're Western Nebraskans for a Profitable Ag Economy." And then all you're doing is saying, "Who wouldn't want seven-dollar corn, and Representative So-and-So has voted against every effort to get you that money every time." And run it on radio, because that's mostly— Because the TV market comes out of Colorado for Western Nebraska. He [the challenger] lost 53-47. It was unbelievable. It was really cool. By the time it was over, he had ten or fifteen staff, and the pros were flying in, and canned radio ads. Then he had to go back to branding cattle. (laughs)

So I keep an eye on those things. That would be really fun to do. But I think you need to be younger. And I don't use the word lightly. It's porn. A lot of this is political porn. It's not an appropriate term for a lot of things. But the obscenity of finance and finance reform, who has got the money and who doesn't and what money buys, is such that— The great question is, do you play the game with them? Or do you try to put them out of business so they can't play the game at all?

The *Green Money Journal* article

Reti: Thank you. So your article in the *Green Money Journal* asked a lot of questions.[33]

Scowcroft: Tortuous to write. I don't think I'm a very good writer. If I really have time and nobody around me, it does eventually say what I want it to say, but getting there is really hard. And I don't like to stare at a blank screen to write something. I'd rather say, "Here's what I'm thinking. Write it out and I'll edit it or fine tune it."

Reti: Well, there were a lot of great questions you raised in that article.

Scowcroft: Yes, unfortunately that got published in a lot of places, and people thought it was a lot of great questions, and then people wanted me to come speak about it and try to help them answer those questions. I was like, "Whoa! I'm too old." (laughs) So I put the brakes on that.

Reti: Well—

Scowcroft: But for this [oral history]. And I'm in the neighborhood. So, go for it.

Reti: (laughs) Yes, because I'd like to follow up on some of these questions—such as, "How and where do we identify the next wave of changes sure to impact the organic production community?"

An Organic Agriculture Think-Tank

Scowcroft: Well, *how*, traditionally, is a think-tank that's charged with a ten- or twenty-year plan. Hoover has one. (laughs) That's what you task. You have the millions to task those beautiful brothers and sisters who are just wonks and want to write and analyze and postulate and speculate and publish white papers. That's what organic needs.

Reti: A think-tank.

Scowcroft: Yes. OFRF may choose that as a route over the next decade. We've certainly framed employees to do that. But it isn't necessarily the kind of— It could be the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, too. The kind of think-tank that does the level of work some of us desire to see is deep organic and years in the making. A whole bunch of us are really good at waving our arms, and writing as we fly, and lobbying and responding at a moment's notice. But that question is poised on the— You know, okay, we keep saying we're a sixteen-billion-dollar industry, and businesses have a billion dollars at stake, and your philanthropic line is $150K. I mean, you got all these internal consultants telling you about your organic widget growth, but every industry historically has eventually discovered they can leverage public money to pose generic and visionary questions. So why aren't you guys ponying up to do this? Only a few are just beginning to get it, and they're doing it piecemeal, or to their own interests.

For example, the University of New Hampshire was about to close their dairy research. Nobody was going there. The kids were— It was over. And Stonyfield

[Farm] made a quarter-of-a-million-dollar grant to make the entire program organic. They called the other dairy companies who have quite a bit of money right now and they raised a million bucks. Then the development department got involved with this. It was like, oh, duh! And they got old donors in the University of New Hampshire world, and started giving fifty thousands. It was like, oh, that's cool. So they've got a couple of million, I think, now. They've rebuilt the entire facility for organic research. They hired an organic farmer to manage it, and then bought an entire organic herd. So then a donor opportunity is to get your name on Elsie the Cow. (laughter) Now it's "Jane's cow." You get a little update on her milk, and what kind of homeopathic remedies are being used to keep Jane your Cow healthy, the research cow. That is a small, very early indicator that a few—Gary Hirshberg and Stonyfield, and a few others—are getting it. Because they had all the other facilities, beakers, the building was already there, the students. And the applications to get in that program are beginning to grow again.

The best organic dairy researcher is at Cornell [University], which has been very genetic and agro-industrial in their land grant. But these little bursts now of organic oasis are beginning to occur there. We gave a grant to Linda Tikofsky about six years ago. She's a very smart woman. She used that to leverage other monies. We gave her a second grant. She went around and said, "The best farming vision group in the nation thinks I'm the best organic dairy researcher, Cornell. Get your tush in gear." They helped her write an integrated organic program grant. Then that was matched and she has 1.2 million dollars now with four universities, to study organic dairy, and, wonderfully unsolicited, speaks on

behalf of OFRF as the original supporter and the group with the vision to get her going on this.

We now need oral histories of dairy in New England. I mean, that's what a think tank [could do]. It's [documentation of the history of the organic movement] got to burst out all over the country. And think-tanks write the twenty-year plan. Or they publish something and then people get really mad and have to publish something back at you. "That's not the twenty-year plan. *This* is the twenty-year plan."

Reti: We've got the Roots of Change Council in California[34], which is thinking in that time frame.

Scowcroft: Right. It's the only entity. And it's stuttering, stumbling. But they do have this seventy-page paper, and it's a thirty-year plan. So I continue to be very supportive of that. If nothing else happens, somebody finally presented a model that now you can go off and write your thirty-year plan in.

I think the question I posed in *Green Money Journal* was a two-part question. Why don't you read it again for the microphone, and then I'll give you the other half of the answer.

Reti: Well, you asked, *"How* do we identify the next wave of changes sure to impact the organic production community?" And there's also, "and where," which is in parenthesis.

Scowcroft: Right. The *where*—I think, again, maybe it is another project opportunity within OFRF, but I think a possible natural direction of *State of the States* is then to say, okay, we've done three of these. We're not going to really do these anymore. Now you can get these— There's Google and there are any number of other things. We're going to take the six oldest and most dynamic, and create or fund or confront the larger administration to get think tanks going.

Reti: Oh, select those six programs?

Scowcroft: Yes, like Washington State University, Cornell, Oregon State. I think I said last time that I'm so disgusted with most of the University of California system. So UCSC. Cal Poly has really left the gate now and is doing some neat work. Sometimes it takes one person, one tenured professor. I mean, look at Steve Gliessman. I think some monies on a national scale would leverage another generation of deep organic thinking and dialogue as if the foodshed mattered. I need to believe in reincarnation and come back and do this all over again, clearly. (laughter)

Reti: (laughs) Obviously, there is more than one lifetime of work here.

Scowcroft: So those are my thoughts on that.

Box Stores and Organic Food Distribution

Reti: So another question you asked in your article was, "What are the implications of box stores getting into organics?"

Scowcroft: (sigh) I think it's indicative of how successful we've been with almost no resources available to do it. That stated, I think we have to watch out to not overreact, and we have to immediately begin planning for when they fail, and what the collateral damage will be when they do. In the interim— Actually this is one of my current kind of sound byte or paragraphs, is that our job is just to, right outside the limit of those box stores, set up farmers' markets so that when people are driving out the gate they get the real taste of an organic, just-harvested peach directly from the farmer, as compared to an organically gassed, within the infrastructure of allowability, a more widespread and possibly (it's all commodity specific) possibly a less than superior product. So really, if we were strategically inclined, we'd be using the arrival of box stores as an incredible opportunity.

Again, I think to some extent that would be a trade association's job. Certainly, nobody is really doing it in a strategic manner. But early observations are that some of this [shake-up] has already happened. K-mart really has gone out of business in most places. Wal-Mart is now looking over its shoulder at Target. And Costco is really the number one seller of organic, and nobody has really even recognized that. They've done a pretty good job. They said, "We're just going to do this right and deliberately." The supermarkets' response has been, in many cases, to open replications of Whole Foods stores and to buy from local farmers. So Piggly Wiggly's, and Albertson's, and Gelson's, and Raley's, have dramatically increased their organic offerings in different ways. H-E-B, which is one of the best retailers in the country, they almost immediately built Central Markets. And they are out-"Wholefooding" Whole Foods in their lusciousness,

and design, and sensual food buying pleasure. They are about four hundred supermarkets, H-E-B. They're a Texas-based chain that's spreading out through the South, through Oklahoma and elsewhere. Their brilliance—it's still family-owned so they can make some decisions faster, but—the brilliance is if they see Bob's Unbelievably Cool Yogurt bought locally flying off the shelf, they can go to Bob and say, "We've got four hundred more stores to put that in." Their Central Markets are also incubators for successful organic products.

Whole Foods can move on a dime. And my observations are that their brilliance is how they set their regional presidents against each other, and then meet as regional presidents and adopt systemwide an idea that worked in two regions. One particular president got into greening and LEDing his stores eight years ago. All of a sudden they were doing wind energy. They were reducing packaging. Then everyone else started doing it. Well, they looked around, the leadership [of Whole Foods], and realized that not only was he getting all this press in the *Los Angeles Times*, but they were saving money. They had a win-win situation. So they came in and said, "Hey, nationwide. Move. Do this." Knowing more about farming, three years ago this manager hired a staff person to get to know all three hundred of the family farmers, small farmers in the states they cover, and be cognizant of their farming plans and what they are growing and where. Some of it is database work and some of it is just being a road warrior. You're just driving to these amazing farms in Arizona and New Mexico and Nevada and California.

Reti: Getting to know them all.

Scowcroft: Yes, and eventually providing a report on who could grow what Whole Foods wanted them to grow, particularly in ethnic heirloom varieties. If you go to a lot of Whole Foods in California— I mean, this is one of my revelations, and why I need to still hit myself on the side of the head every once in a while. It's too casual to say yuppie, white, rich foodies [are the only customers of Whole Foods]. Because if you go into Whole Foods in Southern California [as a European American] you are a minority. And when you go to the vegetables, you see vegetables there you never knew existed. And you realize that there are Guatemalan and Salvadorean people willing to pay for this. There are Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese people willing to pay for this because a farmer brought these seeds over to these farmers to grow varieties that are culturally appropriate. And now they're doing that in different ways around the country. Or they're setting up farmers' markets. It's actually not a negative to have an organic farmers' market in your Whole Foods parking lot.

Reti: Why not?

Scowcroft: Because people get there and they go to the market and they buy Carl's Unbelievable Peaches and Molino's Tomatoes, and more lettuce than you can believe. And they spend forty-two dollars. And then they turn around and walk inside and buy toilet paper, olives, sushi.

Reti: The stuff they can't get at the farmers' market.

Scowcroft: And then they go and look at the produce and see chayotes, or seven kinds of shelled peanuts, so they buy more produce. You might have lost a little

bit. You cut back on your tomato display, but this just draws a lot more people into your store. They're also buying ten-dollar bottles of vitamins and toothpaste and organic deodorant.

Reti: So there are Whole Foods stores that have farmers' markets?

Scowcroft: That just started this year. That was, not only are we buying local from you wholesalers and direct from farmers, but in every store we have a lease to the parking lot in, we're opening our own. We're offering, we will either hire or do a relationship with the local farmers'-market manager just to open one here free of charge. That came out of the South. The Southern stores sales went first.

So, just to bring it back, how are the box stores going to compete with that? What Wal-Mart is doing is opening mini-Wal-Marts. And they're also looking at what Tesco's doing, what they're going to do over here, and what Trader Joe's is doing. It's a tumultuous period of time. And the box stores have, where I think they are totally vulnerable is the on-time delivery phenomena of their purveyors, their vendors, and the energy it takes to get it there. I read somewhere that Wal-Mart buys eighteen percent of China's gross national export product. One vendor. I actually wrote a note to a friend who is in another world of politics saying, "Why don't you just get Wal-Mart to say they won't buy from China unless they tell North Korea to stop nuclear weapons?" You know? It's just one of five buyers they have. I mean, when our finance problem gets so big that now it's the world's problem because it's too big! So, I wrote, "Hey, why doesn't Wal-Mart just tell them very quietly we're just not going to buy here anymore until you eliminate this nuclear problem?" I got back this email: "You should be in

foreign policy." (laughs) But the flip side is that eighteen percent of Chinese exports have to travel across an ocean by air or boat, and have to be met at a dock and moved inward. A hundred dollars a barrel ain't gonna cut it.

Reti: That's where I was going. With peak oil—

Scowcroft: It ain't gonna cut it. So that's why I think they're going down in the long run. All the media is about how they've gotten the environmental message about packaging. All they're doing is finally cutting costs in how things are packaged. It's all weight. If they cut a cardboard box's weight in half, or redesign it so that it's smaller, so that the box of cereal that's this big [holds hands out wide] but has this much cereal in it [holds hands in smaller area] that it finally gets to be this big as a box, they can ship three times as much cereal in the same container. All they've done is made some blow against the energy costs that are going to keep going up. They've bought themselves some more time. But Whole Foods turns around and says, "We've got three hundred farmers within two hundred miles of our store. And they're going to grow what our customers want."

Reti: So you don't think that the box stores could then forge a relationship with local farmers instead of getting products from China?

Scowcroft: Have you ever driven a flatbed to the back of a 120,000 square foot Wal-Mart? It ain't gonna happen. They don't have the philosophy. The infrastructure has already been built to containerize everything, and have it arrive at a certain time. Wal-Mart and those kinds of box stores are set up where

the cover is taken off the forty-pound box of apples, and people come by and just take apples out of them. Or actually, what most of them have now, is just a ten-pound plastic bag of apples so that nobody has to stack it and no clerk has to check it out. It's just scanned. So you're buying bulk organic food. That's why the salad mixes have gone over so well, scanning.

And then, maybe lastly, is a whole lot of food is water-based. So you're paying to ship broccoli that has to be on ice. How are you going to do that in a box-store environment? You're shipping the ice across the country. Or a tomato? Tomatoes are mostly water, so you are paying one hundred dollars a barrel to ship a tomato that's water. And then next to it is broccoli that's in ice, which is water. It just becomes orders of inefficiencies real soon. I'm already thinking about that and the post-box-store economies.

Reti: And of course that would affect places like Safeway as well.

Scowcroft: Yes. Well, if you look, Safeway has their Life Stores now, which are half semi-box stores and half (humorously) Whole Foods replicated. They're frantically trying to remodel all of these old Safeways to reflect foodies. But they're sort of in between. Last time I asked a Safeway executive they wouldn't answer the question, so I don't know if it's still the case, but I'd heard you can opt out as a system buyer in a Safeway, or at least a produce buyer. But by opting out you also opt out of your entire bonus program, and you might put your benefits at risk. On the other hand, if you opt out and then rebuild your produce department to reflect local needs, if you exceed the profits, they're yours. I had heard this from someone in Santa Cruz years ago, that they were

thinking of opting at one of these Safeways here in town to build an entire organic produce section. But it just seemed to be too much of a career risk to do that.

Reti: That's not for the faint of heart.

Scowcroft: No. Family, house, rent. But just the fact that opportunity exists may be nurtured down the road, where it's much easier to do. All Safeway has to do is change their policies and say, "Look at how successful they are in localizing this. Maybe we do this—you get ten percent of the overall bonus program and ninety percent of the profits." I mean, some of it's just numbers.

Divisions within the Organic Farming Movement

Reti: So another question you asked was, "Can we reach a consensus on some issues that have bitterly divided some longtime organic activists?"

Scowcroft: The vast majority of us can. Nowhere in politics is everyone singing Kumbaya. So I think the answer is no. The current wave of just, almost clinically angry, attack-organic-because-it's-not-pure-enough people have no clue of how and where to compromise. So I've given up on that, other than maybe someday I'll respond to the kind of vicious mud they throw around. The level of viciousness and lack of accountability. There are certain minimal rules that you play by if you want to be part of human society, and these guys aren't even playing by those rules. So it's sort of a pox on their house, and that is actually just happening through their actions anyways, so —

Reti: People like that tend to self-destruct.

Scowcroft: They are burning down the building around them. But it's bad. Particularly in the press, I'm never a fan of—oh, the media is doing this and that—but there has been a bit of an interesting phenomenon as some of these controversies come out, that the nuanced disagreements aren't fully fleshed out. I talk to reporters all the time. "Oh, I wrote that. The editors wanted some more spunk or something. That's not really news, that so-and-so thinks that that rule is off." "'Someday a compromise will be reached'—that's not news. We need something flashy. Can you tell me somebody who just says these are evil people who are working as mouthpieces of the multinational corporation?" I hear that enough that I say, "You ought to know better than that. You can find them in Google, and I'm not going to tell you who is going to fill that space for you." And they say, "Oh, yes. I'm sorry. I should have known that. Okay." And sometimes the story just gets spiked then, because they haven't made it sexy enough. And other times they've found one of the two or three people to say, "Don't believe it. It's sold out. It's no good anymore."

People have put a lot of words in Michael Pollan's mouth. The *[San Francisco] Chronicle* just had (I don't know if you saw it last weekend in their food section) a long interview piece with Michael and how he has become the foodies' guru: "What would Michael Pollan say? What would Michael do?" Which has made him really uncomfortable. Even in the paper he's like, "Oh, no, no. Wait a minute. I'm going to write about something else if this keeps up." But the words that certain people or advocacy groups have put in his mouth: "You're not pure

enough, and look what he's written. You're not good enough. It's all coming down because of this and that." If you read him closely, he's never said that. He's pointed out some of the challenges that we have, some of the questions that we should be asking, or different ways to do that.

So the *Columbia Journalism Review* wrote a piece about Michael.[35] It was a great piece. Their magazine said that one of the reasons it's just so difficult to be an advocate and to pose questions that are perceived as pure on one issue, is you usually can't be pure in all the other ones in your life. So they used as an example, well, take Michael Pollan. He's done incredible work on food and buying local and he wrote a book and made a zillion, and is *the* person. But he's jumping on planes doing national book tours. If he believed in local he should be doing book tours that he can walk to. It was a humorous piece, but it raised complexity upon complexity, and compromise upon compromise.

I've used that in a number of areas to say, "Look, we're trying. And yes, this is an issue. And yes, we're in a phase where box stores are out there and multinationals are trying to produce an organic product. But if you've been in this for thirty years you remember when people went apoplectic when a four-hundred-acre farmer showed up." We were all ten acres, and four hundred was evil. And now, four hundred is the family farmer we love. And there are some people that were saying it was evil, and don't relate to the fact that we remember when they were saying that, and are now out there singing the praises, and that five thousand is evil. I have little respect for those people and that lack of historic perception. You roll with it. After thirty years, we're only at three percent of the

food economy. Why we should be spending our time saying, "It's all over and it doesn't mean anything any more." If I don't watch out, I do get pretty irritated, because in actuality if you use the word 'organic' anywhere you've just voluntarily given up almost seven thousand suspected or synthetic chemicals. I think certified organic means a hell of a lot, whoever uses it, if your perspective is agricultural chemicals introduced into the environment.

Reti: Which is where you started in all of this.

Scowcroft: That's right. I do give people room. If you started the consumer movement in purity, okay, you get a little more credit here because you've been doing this for twenty years. But if you're just looking to destroy, and don't have anything to contribute, to build—then, as I said, a pox on your house. Good luck.

Rural Vitalization and Organic Agriculture

Reti: What about the whole movement to make labor standards part of certification?

Scowcroft: I don't yet see how that peg can fit in this hole. I've, around the table, suggested that there might be another way. But the think-tankers are going to have to tank it and think it first. Most immediately, I think the European model of the multifunctionality of organic foods is what we're interested in.

Reti: What does that mean?

Scowcroft: That organic brings multiple benefits, if you invest in them and are transparent about them. The Swiss are by far the most advanced in actually

academically studying and publishing papers on this. What they say is that you've got to farm organically, but if you farm in a whole-systems manner *as if*, and then they list—as if carbon sequestration matters; as if reducing your water use matters; as if soil conservation matters; as if rural vitality matters; as if community and taste and sense of place matter—then you will reap the multiple benefits of farming organic. So we've actually had money, and have been looking for some grad student that wants to use this as their Ph.D. thesis or write a long paper with resources on what the multifunctionality of what an organic product in North America would look like. Because some of the Swiss work is not culturally transferable. They had four hundred years to perfect it, and we have part of our own community saying, "Organic doesn't mean anything anymore." So (laughs) it's a little hard to get everybody on that particular train.

But that, to me, is where labor comes in. It's rural vitality. I tried to get Joan Gussow once to do a study on the Capay Valley and/or the Anderson Valley in California. These were two agricultural areas that supported an entire farming community that went under, and farms were left, or abandoned, or barely farmed. Capay is about sixty miles outside of Davis/Sacramento, and Anderson is in Mendocino. Both are almost all certified organic now, and the schools have more kids again, and the volunteer fire departments are there, but they're doing organic pancake breakfasts. And the farm workers have bought houses, or live there and have farm worker housing that is absolutely appropriate to their lifestyle and family needs. Bilingual languages are spoken in both schools. So my gentle critique to my labor brothers and sisters is they're trying to take this peg and put it in a certification hole in a non-systems and long-range thinking—

Patricia Allen and I have gone around on this a few times. Julie Guthman and I dove into it pretty big when she was writing her book *Agrarian Dreams*.[36] I'm in there and I'm in the acknowledgements. Our discussions have been wonderfully constructive. For the most part, labor is almost always combative, the conversations around that, at least in California. So I feel like I've been able to share that in a really cool, thoughtful way.

And then one time I was on a panel about farm aid with [United Farm Workers President] Arturo Rodriguez, and we were on the same plane flying back to California. We got a couple of hours flying back, and I got to explore some of these thoughts, or a third way, with the UFW. There was nobody around. There was no audience for anybody to play to. I came away thinking, wow, he's thinking about this too. Again, it was sort of upside the head. Don't pre-frame *anybody* when some of these questions come up. I think in larger groups some of the other UFW activists have to play to certain audiences. *I* have to play to certain organic audiences (laughs), have to be aware of those and very sensitive to those. But I'd rather talk about rural vitality, where labor is a participatory colleague in the discussion and the idea is long-term success.

You can point to a number of farmers now who have already figured that all out. They hire for salaried positions. They might have three months off, or six months off, but they're framed as a salaried position with health care and bonus contributions and educational opportunities and management ladders. There are a whole bunch of them now in California that are operating that way. So that was part of what I shared with him. Is there a way where the old contract for twelve

months—where there's a training opportunity for management positions on organic farms that are salaried and health plans and benefits. So you don't necessarily get your contract monies back per worker, but you have placed career employees. Maybe there is a career placement framework for that, as in headhunters, or something like that. So I had some fun. It was fun to be able to wave your arms and go into areas that you don't get to do in the day job. I got to do that with him at 30,000 feet.

I think my sisters, mostly sisters, thinking about this and writing about this, particularly, are more academically inclined and not necessarily in the dirt, on-the-farm inclined.

Reti: Well, that's what I wanted to ask you—because you have been one of the directors of CCOF, and know the certification model—is this idea of including labor standards something that fits into that model? And you're saying, no, it doesn't.

Scowcroft: Yes, well in the 1980s, CCOF couldn't even pass a motion that said all CCOF members must meet current state labor laws to get certified. That was obscene. Because some felt that that was moving into an area that just had nothing to do with soil fertility. So they just didn't even want to go there. They didn't want to see a sentence that just said to the inspector, "Hey, did you meet all labor laws? Check." They didn't want to do that. That was an intense year of bitter stuff. It was pretty damn disappointing. So that's how polarized— And that history is still very close to the surface for some people, and the long memories—

Well, let's just say, we're in a whole different part of the farm here. We're talking about rural vitality and schools, and could we talk about that as a way— And some go, "Okay, well, as long as you don't talk about certification, sure." As a matter of fact, in a way, many have kind of, without thinking about it, leapt twelve bounds to keep their operations sustainable and vibrant with their workforce. But damn it, nobody is going to put something on their certification paperwork. And other people still want to fight that fight.

By the way, just for the record, I recommend Julie Guthman's book. It's a unique document that's very important for people's libraries. I've been recommending that around the country. Some people forget there is a difference between recommended reading and endorsing the content per se, or perspectives in it. And Patricia Allen's work as well. There are very few studying this and we need a lot more activity in that area as well.

Bringing a Historical Perspective to Sustainable Agriculture

Reti: I think you have answered most of the questions I have. I want to say that I appreciate your historic perspective on all of this. Quite a while ago I read the transcript of a talk you had given at Eco-Farm where you spoke about the need to document the oral history of the organic farming movement. And that's partly what inspired this oral history project.[37] Not too many people have historic perspectives, a sense of the trajectory of the organic farming movement that you've demonstrated in this interview.

Scowcroft: Yes, I can get rolling with some caffeinated tea, for sure.

Reti: (laughs)

Scowcroft: In writing some of my own history for another project, I am realizing how much difficulty I have with the word "I." But almost all of organic is "we." I really came up with the Organic Caucus idea. The light bulb came on and I said, "We're going to do this." Legislation—I sent Mark [Lipson] into Kathleen's office to write a national law. But that was just, "Go meet her and see what she thinks." I didn't realize he was going to come back saying, "Well, we wrote the first few pages and it's rolling. It's happening right now." That's the preamble to that, if there's one of the legacies, as [my] orderly disengagement occurs, there's a whole bunch of mistakes we can easily not make again if Generation O reads twenty or three books that might come out of this history project, or the papers, the tearing down of the organic doesn't mean anything. The next time that comes around, or the next generation that talks about purity, everyone will say, "Seven thousand chemicals not in the environment doesn't mean anything?" I mean, that will just be dismissed. Fighting over pasture, where some of these folks— I say, yes, we really need to get that right, and we need to debate and be passionate about it. Or fighting over the important role of water and labor in our farms. We've got to get really passionate about it in a systems way, not one at a time without an understanding of the interrelatedness of that. We can go there a lot easier if we have tens of peoples' thirty-year perspective on this. And so, you have no idea what's going to happen to you about three years from now when all of this is collected and there are some transcripts out there as a resource. Because me and a number of others are going to be directing all the Gen O's to you to get this stuff.

Reti: Good. Well, it will be right on the web.

Scowcroft: No, no, no. You don't just get to say, "Go to www blah-blah-blah." I mean, somebody is going to turn the tables on you and at least get thirty minutes of, "What got you to choose to do this?" So okay, I'm blamed for saying the thing [at Eco-Farm] where your light bulb went off. But there's only one other person that I know of that's even done this, really. And I'm hoping that you two get to meet at some point. That's Dr. Mary Gold. She's the reference librarian for the National Alternative Ag Library. They did an oral history series on some of the sustainable ag [pioneers].[38]

Reti: Oh, yes. Those are good interviews.

Scowcroft: Mary is our hero there. Mary is fantastic. Alternative Technology Transfer for Rural Areas [ATTRA] has done some histories, too. But really, Mary is the only other one I know. She did Garth Youngberg, and I hope she did Dick Harwood, because he's got to be in his eighties now. We're going to do the cover story on him and the 1980 Organic Task Force Report and how that led to the Sustainable Ag Research Education Program, and Chuck Benbrook's work in alternative agriculture. Chuck is one of the early heroes in all of this. He's up in Oregon right now. He wrote [the 1989 report] *Alternative Agriculture* for the National Academy of Sciences and then got fired for writing it.[39] (laughs) Because he did a 560-page treatise with a hundred pages of citations under each chapter on why alternative agriculture's yields are better and the farmers are making more money. Then he made the mistake of going out and promoting it

everywhere. "Hey, farmers. Look at this. It's done. The proof is here. Get out of soybeans and corn and Monsanto, man." So they fired him.

And just three weeks ago the National Academy of Sciences finally took the risk to form a committee called Agriculture in the 21st Century. Its charge is to review twenty years of work after the 1989 alternative-ag book and provide recommendations for the twenty-first century. There is a new executive director, and there is a new committee of esteemed people, and Dick Harwood is one of the committee members. I think he's emeritus. Dick was on the 1980 task force report, and advisor to the alternative ag in 1989. Now he's on the twenty-first-century committee. We played a major role in pulling that together and getting the committee members on it we wanted. We have a lot of places where our fingerprints aren't immediately available and I'm a little nervous, but I figure two or three years from now it will be important. We'll see.

So, just in closing (I don't do this entirely for free), your charge is to (as I said from the podium), it's not necessarily you—it's the next master's student who somehow finds you, or is just stuck in the library, or appears in College Eight, or is farming and then decides to go back and get a Ph.D.—that you are making sure that they are going to study our roots.

Reti: Oh, absolutely. Well, thank you, Bob.

[1][1] John Jeavons is known internationally as the leading researcher and method developer, teacher, and consultant for the small-scale, sustainable agricultural method known as GROW BIOINTENSIVE mini-farming. See http://www.johnjeavons.info/john-jeavons.html

[2] See Orin Martin, "French Intensive Gardening: A Retrospective," in *News & Notes of the UCSC Farm and Garden*, Issue 112, Winter 2007.

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

[4] Warren Weber is the owner of Star Route Farms in Marin County, California, has been a president of CCOF, and is a longtime organic foods activist. See the oral history with Andy Griffin in this series for more on Warren Weber.

[5] See the oral history with Amigo Bob Cantisano in this series.

[6] (Westview Press, 1987).

[7] See the oral history with Sam Farr in this series.

[8](San Francisco, California: Friends of the Earth/Salina, Kansas Land Institute, 1980).

[9] *Report and Recommendations on Organic Farming* (USDA 1980).

[10] See the oral history with Stephen R. Gliessman in this series.

[11] See the oral histories with Steve Gliessman, Sean Swezey, and Amigo Bob Cantisano in this series for more on SAREP.

[12] Wes Jackson, Wendell Berry, and Bruce Colman, eds. *Meeting the Expectations of the Land: Essays in Sustainable Agriculture and Stewardship*, (North Point Press, 1985).

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

[14] In February of 1989 CBS aired "Intolerable Risk: Pesticides in our Children's Food," which publicized the use of the carcinogen Alar, a chemical sprayed on apples to regulate their growth and enhance their color. After widespread public reaction, the Environmental Protection Agency banned Alar in late 1989.

[15] Mitchel Benson, "Carrot Crisis Organic Veggie Scam Alleged," May 11, 1988, Page 1A, *San Jose Mercury News*.

[16] In February 2009, President Barack Obama chose Kathleen Merrigan as deputy secretary of agriculture, the number two position in the United States Department of Agriculture. In a message to attendees of the third annual Organic Summit (www.theorganicsummit.com) Merrigan pledged that organic will be integrated across all agencies at USDA. "Delivering pre-recorded comments, Merrigan stated that, "here is where I'd like to fulfill a promise I made to many of you…and that is, organic should be integrated across all the agencies, not just the NOP, but each and every agency at USDA should have some engagement with the organic sector." In addition to emphasizing the importance of this integration, Merrigan said, "Organic can no longer be stove-piped at USDA." See http://www.theorganicsummit.com/os09/public/Content.aspx?ID=1009153

[17] This meeting took place on December 1, 1989—Editor.

[18] See the oral history with Jim Cochran that is part of this series.

[19] The current stated mission of OFRF is: "Our purpose: To foster the improvement and widespread adoption of organic farming systems. Our mission: to sponsor research related to organic farming; to disseminate research results to organic farmers and to growers interested in adopting organic production systems; and to educate the public and decision-makers about organic farming issues."

[20] On October 23, 2002, organic blueberry farmer and National Organic Program (NOP) organic inspector Arthur Harvey filed suit against then U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman. This happened two days after the National Organic Program was fully implemented. Harvey charged that the USDA overstepped its boundaries in drafting the standards guiding the program, that nine provisions of the new rule are out of sync with the Organic Food Production Act (OFPA) of 1990 and dilute its organic standards. See the Rodale Institute's article: "Harvey v. Veneman's spectre of unintended consequences roils organic waters: Successful legal challenge to parts of the USDA Organic Rule could have a big impact on producers and the marketplace."

"http://www.newfarm.org/columns/org_news/2005/0405/harvey.shtml

[21] Bob Scowcroft, "The Organic Conversation Begins Anew" (again) *GreenMoneyJournal.com* http://greenmoneyjournal.com/article.mpl?articleid=505&newsletterid=24

[22] See Wendy Krupnik's oral history for more on Tasting of Summer Produce.

[23] In 1979 the California Agrarian Action Project [CAPP], a Yolo County-based organization that focused on the rights of farm workers, filed suit against the University of California for using taxpayer dollars in the creation of technologies that benefit large farms and hurt small farms and farm workers. The case against UC was won in 1986, but later lost on appeal to the California Supreme Court in 1989. CAPP later became part of California Alliance of Family Farmers [CAFF]. See http://www.caff.org/join/history.shtml

[24] Don Villarejo has been a lifelong activist in the civil rights, peace, and farmworkers' movements. He began a career as a physicist who taught at UC Davis, but later switched to the field of agricultural economics. He founded the California Institute for Rural Studies (CIRS) in 1977, serving as executive director until 1999. CIRS is a private, non-profit research and education organization dedicated to helping create a rural California that is socially just, economically viable and ecologically balanced.

[25] Vance Corum founded several farmers' markets in Southern California in 1979, including markets in inner-city parts of Los Angeles such as Gardena. The Santa Monica Market opened in 1981. Corum served as Direct Marketing Specialist with the California Department of Food Agriculture for ten years and is also a consultant in farmers' market development, research and management. He has helped more than seventy-five cities start farmers' markets. See Russ Parsons, "The Idea that Shook the World," *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 2006.

[26] See http://ofrf.org/policy/organic_caucus/organic_caucus.html. See also Dennis Nodin Valdes, "Machine Politics in California Agriculture, 1945-1990s," *The Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (May, 1994), pp. 203-224.

[27] See http://ofrf.org/action/ofan/071128_alert.html.

[28] See the Community Alliance with Family Farmers analysis of the Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement at http://www.caff.org/policy/foodsafetylg.shtml.

[29] See Mark Lipson, "Searching for the "O-Word": An Analysis of the USDA Current Research Information System (CRIS) for Pertinence to Organic Farming" at http://ofrf.org/publications/o-word.html

[30] See Patricia Allen's oral history in this series.

[31] See the oral history with Scott Roseman on the history of New Leaf Market.

[32] See Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (Penguin Press, 2006), and *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* (Penguin Press, 2008).

[33]See "The Organic Conversation Begins Anew," in *Green Money Journal*, Winter 07/08, http://greenmoneyjournal.com/article.mpl?newsletterid=39&articleid=505

[34] See http://www.rocfund.org/

[35] See Christopher Shea, "New Grub Street: How Did Ethics Become a Staple of Contemporary Food Writing?," *Columbia Journalism Review*, May/June 2007. http://www.cjr.org/essay/new_grub_street.php?page=all

[36] Julie Guthman, *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California* (University of California Press, 2004).

[37] See: "New Directions for the Sustainable Agriculture Movement: A Conversation about Strategy January 2005 and Beyond," at which Scowcroft said, "One can't focus on the future until one has a solid grasp of the past. One of our collective failures has been the lack of attention paid to our written and oral history. Only two or three of the participants in the 'Asilomar Declaration' discussion are here today. Several have passed away. Others have left the sustainable/agriculture universe. Who has collected their papers? Where is the Center for Organic [Farming] History Research? Who is collecting the oral histories of these and many other important attendees?" http://www.eco-farm.org/efa/declaration/newdirections_scowcroft.html

[38] See the National Agricultural Library's Alternative Farming Systems Information Center's Oral History Series at http://desearch.nal.usda.gov/cgi-bin/dexpldcgi?qry1324265176;1. See also Mary Gold and Jane Potter Gates's excellent bibliography, "Tracing the Evolution of Organic/Sustainable Agriculture," at http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/tracing/tracing.shtml.

[39] National Research Council, "Alternative Agriculture," (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1989).