Amigo Bob Cantisano

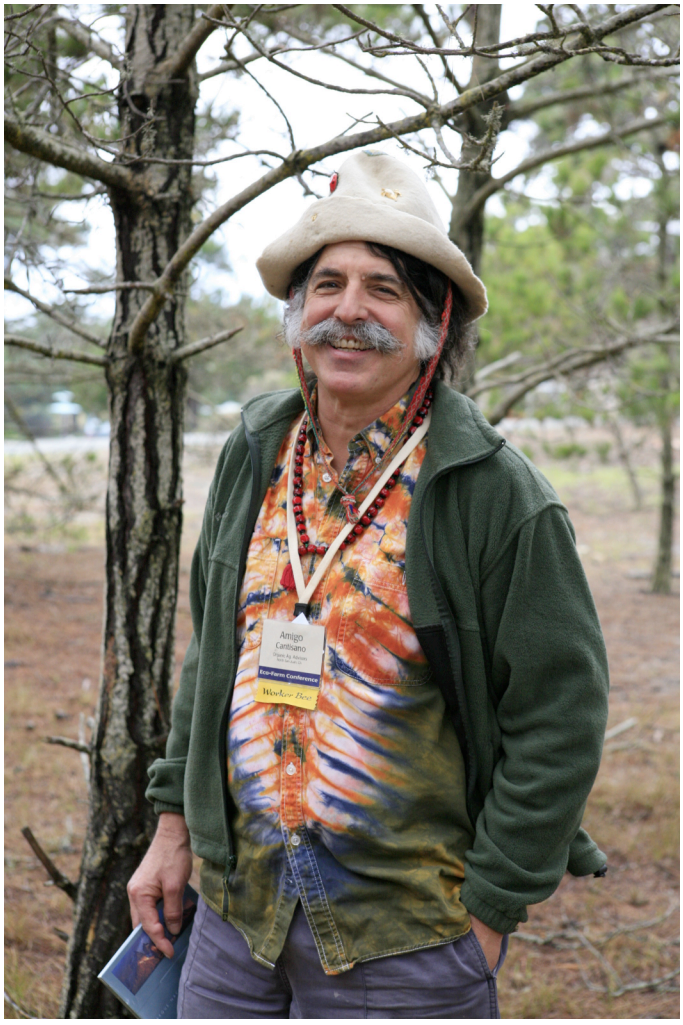

Photo by Saxon Holt

Organic Farming Advisor

Founder, Eco-Farm Conference

One of the most widely experienced and influential figures in California organic agriculture, Amigo Bob Cantisano is perhaps best known as the founding organizer of the annual Ecological Farming Conference, which celebrates its 30th anniversary in January 2010 and is the largest sustainable-

agriculture gathering in the Western United States. Recognized among conference-goers for his adept leadership of Eco-Farm's popular bus tour of Central Coast organic farms—and for sporting trademark shorts and sandals no matter what the weather—Amigo (a high-school girlfriend gave him the nickname) has been involved with diverse aspects of organic foods and farming since the late 1960s. In 1990 he and his wife Kalita Todd received the Stewards of Sustainable Agriculture (Sustie) award from the Ecological Farming Association.

Cantisano is a ninth-generation Californian, directly descended from a lieutenant in the 1775-76 Juan Bautista de Anza expedition, which created the first land route between New Spain and Alta California. He began gardening in earnest while living on communes in Northern California. He had a stint as dishwasher and prep cook at an early San Francisco vegetarian café (Good Karma) and as an employee of the city's first natural foods emporium (New Age)—both owned by Fred Rohé, whom Cantisano calls "the founder of the whole natural foods movement." These experiences, plus exposure to Rodale Press's Organic Gardening *magazine and a speaker's warnings about chemical pesticides at San Francisco's first Earth Day celebration, clinched Cantisano's early interest in organic food.*

While living on the shores of Lake Tahoe in the early 1970s, Cantisano and some friends started a natural foods buying club. This evolved into a wholesale distribution company and retail storefront, eventually introducing him to many organic growers and producers in California and beyond. He was involved in early efforts to certify organic farms and products, helping to found California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF), and he collaborated in the production of an early organic-products trade journal.

Cantisano has also worked as an organic farmer, growing a variety of crops over the years in a succession of California locations. His search for a reliable source of organic inputs led him to found a farm supply company, Peaceful Valley, which grew at an astonishing pace and currently operates

under different owners in Grass Valley, California. His desire for better communication among organic growers in California prompted him to organize a 1981 gathering—featuring a talk by pioneering beneficial-insect purveyor Everett "Deke" Dietrick—that evolved into EcoFarm (whose organizers have recently dropped the hyphen in their moniker). Cantisano established the first organic agriculture advising business in the country, and served for many years as the only independent organic farming advisor on the West Coast. Operating for more than two decades now as Organic Ag Advisors, he has consulted with hundreds of small and large growers of fruits, vegetables, wine grapes, grains, and other crops—advising both organic farmers and those making the transition from conventional farming.

A lively narrator with vivid recollections of many significant chapters and characters in the history of California organic culture and agriculture, Amigo Bob Cantisano has countless stories to tell. Sarah Rabkin interviewed him on April 7th and 9th, 2008, in the farmhouse kitchen of his Heaven and Earth Farm, located on the San Juan Ridge in California's Sierra Nevada foothills, north of Nevada City.

Additional Resources

Verlyn Klinkenborg, "Amigo Cantisano's Organic Dream," *New York Times*, Sunday, March 10, 1996. http://www.nytimes.com/1996/03/10/magazine/amigo-cantisano-s-organic-dream.html

Laurie Daniel, "Grapegrower interview Amigo Bob Cantisano: Organic Farming Pioneer Stresses Far-reaching Solutions," *Wines and Vines*, July 2009.

Ecological Farming Association, organizers of the Ecological Farming Conference (EcoFarm) http://www.eco-farm.org/index.php/efc

Beginnings

Rabkin: I'm going to start by taking you back to really early years. I've heard that you are a seventh-generation Californian. Is that correct?

Cantisano: That's correct.

Rabkin: What do you know about your ancestors who first came here, where they came from, why they immigrated, what they did here?

Cantisano: My ancestors were the first white people in California. My direct ancestor was the lieutenant in the de Anza Spanish march that came across from Monterrey, Mexico and settled all the places along the coast of California—San Diego, and Santa Barbara, and Los Angeles. They went to Monterey, where de Anza set it up as the capital of [California], and then sent my ancestor, Joaquin Moraga, out to establish the next settlement, which turned out to be San Francisco, or Yerba Buena. He was the commandant of the Presidio. That was in 1775.[1] Then the missionaries came along, and he and they put together the mission in the Mission District. He was the commandant for about thirty-five, forty years, and his son. They both came together. So I'm either a seventh generation or a ninth generation Californian, depending on how you count. It's seven generations born here, but if you count the first two generations that were here, because he and his son marched here, then I'm the ninth generation. At any rate, so then his son was the explorer, Gabriel Moraga, and he went around, and basically everything that's named in Spanish in Northern and Central California

is the result of my family.[2] They were the first white people to cruise around. And then they did a lot of settlements. So what I know of the ones they named and settled are Sacramento, San Rafael, Santa Cruz, and Santa Clara. I can't remember the others. There's a long list. Thank God my great aunt started collecting the history of our family. When I was growing up nobody spoke Spanish anymore in my family. It was not cool to be Spanish. You know, you are an American. We were Californios, as they were called, but they spoke English.

So, at any rate, then the third generation, Joaquin Moraga's grandson, also named Joaquin, who was also in the Spanish army, was given a land grant. The Spanish didn't have any money. They didn't pay the army for two generations. So that's where the land grants came in. They got land grants in exchange for the previous two generations' reparations. That's when we got the Moraga [Palo Colorado] land grant, which is where the town and valley of Moraga is, and Walnut Creek. It's everything from the eastern hills above Oakland over past Walnut Creek. It's about six thousand acres. It was cattle ranch land and redwood country. And we had that until California became a state.

Then the United States declared all those land grants illegal because, reputedly, they didn't recognize the Spanish method of surveying. Other than the few Americans like John Sutter and John Bidwell, who had already bought their ranchos from a Spanish guy—those are the only people who got to hold onto them. Everybody else who was Spanish ended up losing his or her property. It took quite a while. I've read different things. It was about sixty-seven years before they finally kicked the last of the family off. We ended up being landless

peasants. In that time, though, my family married into the Vallejos. So we actually had some Vallejo property at one point, in the town of Vallejo, as well as in Sonoma. So we were kind of threaded back into the Vallejos and the Moragas, but my direct ancestors are the Moragas.

Rabkin: And where and when were you born?

Cantisano: I was born in San Francisco in June of 1951.

Rabkin: And where did you grow up?

Cantisano: Most of the time in San Francisco, until my parents got divorced when I was nine. Then I did part time between San Francisco and where my mom lived, which was varying places—South San Francisco, San Bruno, and Pacifica. I spent part of my time with my dad and part of my time with my mom.

Rabkin: Do you have early memories of working with plants and soil?

Cantisano: My grandma. Yes, Grandma Dorothy, my dad's mom, who was a Moraga (that was her last name), was a gardener, and a really good one, at least that's my recollection of her. It seemed like she was a good gardener. And she liked to make a lot of food from the garden. My first recollection of my Grandma Dorothy that I have that's really strong is we were both in the garden crawling around in the cucumber plants. And that, I think, was the first time I'd seen a cucumber plant or a cucumber. I can remember the little spines on the cucumbers as we picked them. Then we went in the house and made pickles with them. It was all part of that process. And at one point in time my grandma said

something like, "You've got good skills at this," or, "You're good at this." That sort of stuck. My grandma was definitely a gardener, and she was into composting. I remember she grew fava beans. I remember that quite distinctly because they were such a unique plant. We used to pick those. She grew all Italian and Spanish things. Her parents were Italian and Spanish. We ate that kind of stuff growing up. I grew up in a family that ate pesto. And until I was probably in my twenties I never really saw that out in society. People didn't eat fava beans. Artichokes were kind of rare. I remember all that stuff was part of our regular heritage. And big diverse salads. I mean, everybody was eating head lettuce in the fifties and sixties. My grandma made salads with radicchio. I don't remember all that was in them. I just remember there were these very colorful and real diverse kinds of salads. Thank goodness she was such a chef and gardener.

My dad didn't seem like he really had any interest in gardening. My great aunt and uncle, when I was a kid, owned a farm in Lodi. They grew wine grapes and cherries. They had been in the wine business but they were in the wine grape business during Prohibition. They sold all their grapes for sacramental uses, because that's the only way you could legally sell grapes during that period. Some other parts of my family were in Sacramento involved in running illegal wine. It was part of their deal. That was the Cantisano part of the family. And that's how, apparently, the Cantisanos and the Moragas met up. I'm not quite sure. No one has ever been really detailed about that.

But any rate, I used to go out in the summers and hang out with my Great-Uncle Anthony. I remember he would let me ride or drive the tractor, as I got older. I got to go out and do the harvest with them in cherry season. So we'd be up there for cherry season, and I'd be, of course, picking cherries. But I was really slow as a kid. So they would let me do things like moving the buckets around, or moving the ladders, or going into the packing shed and working in the shed. And then as I got older, I would ride with him, and we would drive the truck or tractor around, picking up the boxes. Then eventually he let me drive the tractor. I didn't really feel like I was a farmer, but it was this wonderful joy of driving that tractor. I was on a farm. And my Great Aunt Isabel had chickens and turkeys, and I remember I used to help with those chores. She was a gardener too. I don't remember her gardens as well as my grandma's. My grandma seemed to be the gardener. But they had gardens and they fed themselves as well. They had grown up in the Depression, so they had all that Depression-era mentality. They canned everything. That's where I learned how to can things, and pickles and all that—from the grandparents and the great-aunt and uncle.

Rabkin: Where did you go to school?

Cantisano: Initially in the City. I went to a couple of different elementary schools. For high school I went to Capuchino High and to Crestmoor High School, both in San Bruno, California. I didn't go to college. When I graduated from high school in 1969, they were drafting people. So I went and registered at the local junior college as a draft dodger, and went to school for about three weeks, which was long enough to get the piece of paper that said I was in school.

So I didn't get drafted in the fall of 1969, and the winter and spring of 1970. And then by that next year, they issued the lottery. And the lottery— I was like in the 260s or something, too high to get picked. So I ended up not going to college.

But by that point in time I had already started living in communes. Most of the last three years of high school I pretty much didn't live at home. I would visit my mom or my dad, but the Haight-Ashbury was going by that point in time.[3] I had a bunch of friends who lived there. My family is all involved in the music industry, in the varying fortunes, or lack thereof. My dad was a disc jockey, and my cousin and uncle were disc jockeys. So I hung around that whole scene, and from that I ended up living at their places, or living with them, or whatever. Living in communes at that point was pretty popular. So in 1968 and 1969 I lived in communes, mostly in the City, in the Haight. At one point I lived in Pacifica in a commune. That's when I started doing gardening, because it was like, starvation time, and the only free food that was around (the Diggers were giving away free food[4]) but the only thing else that was really around was USDA surplus food, which was a bunch of crap. We would take it gratefully. That was before food stamps. We didn't have any money. So we started gardening, tore up the backyard and started growing stuff, partly because I had a little experience from when I was a kid, and partly because I was just determined to do it. And then there was one other kid who had grown up and lived on a farm, I think. He clearly knew something about growing stuff. So the two of us ended up being kind of the commune's gardeners.

Fred Rohé and the Good Karma Cafe

Rabkin: How did you start to get interested in the idea of organic agriculture?

Cantisano: I think at Earth Day in 1970. I went to that at San Francisco State. I don't remember who the speaker was, but it was a guy, and he spoke a lot about the hazards of pesticides. That got me very attuned that there was a bunch of issues. Somebody gave me *Silent Spring*[5] someplace right around that same period of time.

But in 1968 I started working, first as a dishwasher at the Good Karma Café in the Mission, which was this natural foods vegetarian café—among the first, I am told. Later I got to be a prep chef for a short time. Fred Rohé owned this café. Fred started the first natural foods store, a supermarket. It was called New Age Natural Foods. It was a converted Purity building, which was kind of like the predecessor of Safeway or one of those chain stores. It was in the Haight, on Stanyan Street. Fred Rohé owned this place, too. Fred Rohé is, I think, the founder of the whole natural foods movement. Fred was a brilliant guy. He was a businessman. At that point in time, the only place you could buy natural foods pretty much was the red-carpet health-food-store pill-shop phenomena. Nobody had yet gone into the natural foods business— In fact, they didn't even use the term natural foods yet. It was "health foods." But Fred opened this mini supermarket of natural foods. There were very few organic growers at the time, but there were a few. And the organic people (hippies) were looking for organic.

I worked in that store for a few months, part of the time in the produce department, and met some of the organic farmers.

And then I worked at his café, which was called the Good Karma Café. That was out in the Mission, right across the street from the Mission that my ancestors helped settle. The Good Karma Café was a natural foods restaurant and that's where I first started eating natural foods. Brown rice, I'm sure I'd never eaten before that. Or stir fries or tofu. There were just all kinds of interesting foods that I'd never eaten. I worked there as a dishwasher and then later as a prep chef. So in that circle of people, plus the hippies I was hanging out with, there was all this interest in "natural foods." That was the up-and-coming thing. And at some point in time *Organic Gardening* ended up in my hands and I read it. I thought that was pretty cool.

Communes and Food Conspiracies

And then in summer of 1969 I moved to a commune in Mendocino County outside of Laytonville, where again the same problem: no money. We started growing stuff, and at some point in time the word *organic* kind of crept into the conversation. I realized my grandmother had been an organic gardener, but no one ever talked about that. But she made compost and got chicken manure from a neighboring chicken ranch, and grew fava beans, and as far as I knew didn't use any pesticides. All the weeds were controlled by hand. She was a de facto old world gardener. But then it became sort of like: "Oh, this is what organic gardening is. Oh, it's: don't use chemicals and use these natural fertilizers and

such." Anyway, we started growing stuff there in "Mendo" [Mendocino] for feeding ourselves and that's when it started sticking. It was like, "Oh, we're doing organic gardening."

And then going to that Earth Day in 1970 solidified it in me. Oh, there are these risks to the pesticides and the way people have been growing stuff in monocultures. At that point I didn't really understand all that, although the DDT issue and the information that Rachel Carson had written stimulated me very much. Something about that particular talk got me thinking about it really strongly. So after I did my three weeks at college, and I was hanging around and was living in Pacifica and we were doing that garden there, I went to Earth Day. That would have been April '70, which was, I guess, the first Earth Day.

Then I got really interested in food. Well, what was also springing up right at that same time (maybe it had already been going but I hadn't heard about it), was the buying clubs and the food co-ops and the collectives. They all started springing up in a lot of different places, seemingly sort of simultaneously. I don't really know. That would be interesting, to see what was the genesis of that movement. But I can say that a lot of people I know in this movement came directly out of the co-op movement.

Rabkin: There were "food conspiracies." That I remember.[6]

Cantisano: Food conspiracies, exactly. Yes. And storefront collectives. "Food for people not for profit" was a big motto. I actually took that quite seriously. So in May of 1970 some friends of mine were moving to Lake Tahoe, and they invited

me to come up and visit with them. So I went up and we went to the health food store. And it was really disturbing because it was like going back four years in what health foods were. It was just this plastic pill shop. And it was like, "Well, wait a minute now. This isn't going to work." There were no natural food stores. So the two of us, a friend of mine, Eddie Kitchen, and I said, "You know what? Why don't we just take this idea that we had down in the city and start a buying club?" I hadn't really firmly moved into the neighborhood, but I felt like I wanted to get out of the city. Mendocino was a good step in that direction, but there were no jobs. It was either be a logger or starve. I didn't want to be a logger. Tahoe at least gave you some opportunity to make a living doing something. It was a rural environment. So anyway, I was kind of living there. And then one day we said, "Okay, let's put up a notice on this bulletin board and see if people want to be in a buying club or a food conspiracy." We held this meeting, and fifteen people showed up in somebody's living room. We went, "Well, cool. You guys want to do this?" Everybody said, "Yeah, let's do this." So Eddie and I said, "Okay, we'll take a truck to the city and buy some food for the group." We knew the city. Because I'd worked at New Age Natural Foods, I'd been to a bunch of these distributing companies picking up stuff, or they'd driven stuff in. So we had some idea of where these things were coming from. The buying clubs had these little wholesale things getting started. That's when Veritable Vegetable started. It was right in that period. Early seventies. Veritable had just got going.

We took a run in a pick-up truck down to the Bay, and came back home with a pick-up load of food, and distributed it out amongst us. And that just grew like wildfire. It also consolidated that I wanted to live around there. There were a lot of people interested. There were lots of outdoor things to do. I could actually figure out something I could do that could supplement my meager income. So I basically became the food club coordinator. Then it just kept growing and growing.

Rabkin: And this worked because you were buying it wholesale and dividing it up among a bunch of people?

Cantisano: Yes. We'd basically pay the trucking fees and maybe like twenty bucks a day for our labor. So we'd get twenty to forty or sixty bucks for working for the couple or three days it took to do it. And get paid for the gas and the cost of the truck, and yes, basically buy stuff at wholesale.

Well, that started us going to visit farmers. At that time there was only one farmers' market in Northern California, and that was the Alemany Farmers' Market in San Francisco. It may have been the only one in the state at that time. Someone told me it was the only one in the state. But it was definitely the only one in Northern California. So we would go to that market, and there were a few people there who would say they were organic. So we preferentially would buy from them, although we would buy from conventional people too, because there was almost no organic stuff around yet. So we would buy from conventional as well as organic. I can remember some of these people. Dino Andreotti. He's in

Half Moon Bay, still. Wayne Ferrari, who is in Stockton. There were four or five. Vic Molinari—I haven't seen him in forever. I have no idea if he's still alive. He probably isn't. He was probably in his seventies even back then, sixties or seventies. We always thought he was really old. Whether these guys were organic or not, that's difficult to say. But they were claiming that they were.

And as it turned out, lots of hippies in co-ops and food buying clubs were showing up at this Alemany Market giving progressively more and more business to these farmers that were coming to this farmers' market. Well, our little buying club grew and grew to the point where we were renting an eighteen-foot refrigerated truck and hauling it, not once a month, but twice a month. We had a friend who owned a plumbing company and we were doing the food distribution on Sundays in the plumbing warehouse. We'd break all the food down and everybody would show up. We had hundreds of members at some point. So then we were like, "Well, gee. Maybe we should drive around and go visit farms." So then we started looking for farms between Tahoe and the Bay Area, Sacramento County and Yolo County. That's when the Santa Cruz connection, the Central Coast connection started happening, because some of those people in these buying clubs would bring stuff up and we would meet them. And we would bring what we were— Like, we were the first people to buy rice from the Lundbergs, like the first![7] The only product they had was hundred-pound sacks of short-grain rice. That was it. So we would drive up to Chico. And then, Knudsons and Heinke's were the two juice companies. And almonds. So we would go get these different Central Valley [products], and then stop off at

Howard Beeman's farm near Woodland, which was doing sweet corn and melons, and a few other small farms. We'd take stuff down and take orders from people. And then we'd trade.

And there'd be this trucking group, Santa Cruz Trucking,[8] that would come over from Santa Cruz, and they'd bring some produce from around Santa Cruz up. There was a guy, David Posner. David Posner used to call himself David Gardner. There was an alternative high school up in Felton, Pacific High. David was the trucker for them. He would drive to the desert and to the South Coast and get avocados and dates and stuff. So anyway, this is the informal start of what became all of these businesses that then started trucking and coordinating stuff. David now owns Farmers Fruit Express, which is in Santa Cruz. He's an international broker of organic foods. He was right there at the beginning. You could put David in the: "He was there then." He would bring in crops, and we would bring our stuff, and we would trade with people.

We the People Natural Foods Co-op

Then the buying club started moving into more like a business of transporting and selling organic foods wholesale. And our food co-op moved into a storefront and became a retail business.

Rabkin: Where was that?

Cantisano: That was on the North Shore of Lake Tahoe, in Tahoe Vista. It was called We the People Natural Foods Co-op. It was because we founded the store

on the fourth of July in 1972. So it was like "We the People." You know, very patriotic. So we got this co-op running, and I was a co-manager with a group of other people, which were basically all the members of my commune. We had a storefront. It went crazy from there. We were driving a truck once a week, and then twice a week to the Bay. Then we started doing wholesaling, because there were now other co-ops going and also natural food stores. And we helped get a natural foods bakery going in our town. They needed all this fresh flour from Giusto's. So we started a distributing company that was an offshoot of the retail store. And then that thing just got a life of its own, because there was nobody yet doing that kind of stuff. So we would hook up with this guy, Gilbert, who used to drive down from Nancy's Yogurt in this '49 Chevy panel truck, with the yogurt stuffed in the back under dry ice. And we'd meet him on I-5.

Rabkin: Down from Oregon.

Cantisano: Down from Oregon, yes. We used to drive— Just strange little things like this. Somebody would say, "Oh, do you know about this chicken ranch over here in Sonoma?" And we'd end up over there buying eggs. Bit by bit, all of those businesses became real businesses and got solidified. But at the beginning they were all fly-by-night, seat of the pants. Gilbert was driving that '49 Chevy panel truck. He could barely make it back and forth.

Our store really got going. I moved away from it and into farming. But our store became this distributing company [that] is the predecessor, the parent of what is now United Natural Foods.[9] We the People and Sierra People's Produce merged,

which was a friend of ours, Lee May. He was doing produce exclusively, and it wasn't really working for him to haul produce. He had a trucking route, but he didn't have a truck. He rented a truck. And we had a propane-powered truck. So the co-op and he merged and became Sierra People's Warehouse. And then eventually Lee took over that business over completely, bought it out from the co-op. Then he merged with a guy, Michael Funk, who had Sacramento People's Produce. They ran that for a while, and then Michael moved to Nevada City and he named it Mountain People's Produce. And that was that business for a long time until it merged and became part of United Natural Foods. So anyway, we're like the parents of that big, huge business. I guess it's the biggest natural food distributor in the country now. But all that sort of started from these people trying to work together.

We started visiting farms. And the more I visited farms, the more I realized I really wanted to do farming. Running food around was cool, and it was exciting. We made a little bit of money doing it. I could pay my bills. But we were gardening. We were living in a commune in Truckee at this point, and we had about a two-acre garden. We were selling stuff to the co-op. But that's a very limited climate.

Farming in Yuba City

One of my roommates, Gus Rouse, was a beekeeper. He'd grown up as a farmer in Yuba City and he wanted to go back to farm, but he wanted to do beekeeping with his brother. So he and his brother Monty started doing commercial

beekeeping. Their grandpa owned seven acres of land that wasn't being used, that he had bought near Yuba City. He was going to move onto it, but he hadn't moved onto it yet. He was from the Santa Clara Valley, so that was another Central Coast connection. I wanted to learn about beekeeping, and the intrigue of farming vegetables, nuts and fruits for the co-op was very big. Gus and Monty knew how to farm and they needed help with the bees, so we made a pact to work together.

It turned out Grandpa Rouse was the wise, old organic farmer, although he had given up the organic farming thing when we met him. When I met him in the seventies, he was already almost eighty years old and he'd farmed way before chemicals. He'd farmed his whole life in the Santa Clara Valley or up in Los Gatos. So he knew all about how to do this stuff: "Grandpa, how do you grow a cover crop?" "Well, here's how you do it." "How do you make compost on a farm scale?" "Well, here's how you do it." "How about rotate crops?" He'd kind of laugh at us and go, "Oh, you guys are crazy," but he knew that we had this market with the co-op. He wanted to see his grandsons stay in ag, because everybody was leaving.

So we had the bee business, which eventually got huge. It had six hundred hives by the end of the first year. We did pollination, honey, bee pollen, royal jelly and produced queens and packages of bees for other beekeepers. Then we had this seven acres or almost eight acres of vegetables growing, plus about two acres of mixed fruit and nuts. And we leased a fifteen-acre almond orchard, with a few walnuts.

Rabkin: And where were the seven acres?

Cantisano: On Starr Road outside of Yuba City. We called it Starr Farms. Our co-op would come and pick it up, and then they would haul it down to what became Veritable Vegetable, because that became the Bay Area produce distributor for the food co-ops.

Actually, let's just go back a second. Fred Rohé—let's give him all that credit. Fred Rohé is also the fellow that started the first natural foods distribution company, which was called Pure and Simple. That was based in San Jose. They were one of the places we all bought our stuff from, if you couldn't buy it from a farmer. They were the first people to put Tom's natural tooth products in California. Those kinds of things. They were the place where you went to buy Dr. Bronner's [soap], because they would stock that kind of stuff. Later the other natural foods distributors started, like Veritable [Vegetable], S.F. Common Operating Warehouse, Rock Island Foods, Fowler Brothers, etc.—but Pure and Simple was the first.

Grandpa Rouse was our mentor. We were farming, but were pretty lost, at least I was. He would come up to visit his grandsons and his new property. He was still farming in the Santa Clara Valley, across from IBM there. He would come up, and he would just kind of shake his head. He would go, "Well at least my grandsons are farming. They got this hippie kid farming with them." And then sometimes we'd have ten or fifteen friends come and help. It's a little chaotic. You know, this is the early seventies. We're definitely in the hippie, party mode.

So people are running around mostly naked on his farm. He had a little bit of a hard time with this.

Rabkin: (laughs)

Cantisano: (laughs) But he was really gracious. He would just say, "Don't do this and do that. But do this…." We made some mistakes. Oh, my God *horrendous mistakes*—

Rabkin: Like what?

Cantisano: Oh, like the time we— Of course when you're broke, anything that looks free or cheap looks awfully attractive, right? So what was free in our area? Rice hulls and chicken manure. All you had to do was pay for the trucking. Well, that just was like: "Cool, man. We've got instant fertilizer." Well, little did we know that— I mean, even though Grandma taught me about composting, I didn't know about the downsides of using raw manure yet. And I knew *nothing* about using rice hulls, other than, God, they were just this wonderful fluffy stuff. So we got this just humungous, like a hundred yards or something, a huge amount, and we spread it on one acre. It ended up almost a foot thick. You could barely plow it in. We're out there with a plow and we're driving a tractor back and forth. You get this manure and rice hull combination mixture and nothing would grow.

Rabkin: (laughs)

Cantisano: I mean, just nothing! We'd put a plant in there and it turned yellow and just sat there. It was just like, oh, my God. The weeds started growing eventually, because there were a lot of weeds in the rice hulls, as it turned out (maybe some in the manure, probably in the rice hulls). And then Grandpa just walked up one day and went, "Well, you can't do that." We were so naive and we were literally alone in our attempt to farm organically. There weren't any organic growers. In our county there was one other fellow who was growing organic blackberries. He had an acre and a half of blackberries he'd inherited from his grandparents, and decided to grow organically. But it was nothing like growing melons and tomatoes. We were friends, but we didn't have any— There were no mentors. There was nobody. Grandpa would show up a couple of times a month in between farming, and come up to visit, and just kind of walk around. (laughs) He was really nice about it. He never chewed us out, but he was very straightforward in saying, "This isn't going to work, and here's why."

But we didn't let that stop us. We just kept going forward. That acre or so was pretty much a waste for a couple of years. It eventually broke down and it was farmable. It turned into some nice soil, but it took a couple of years.

Rabkin: So Grandpa was your only farm advisor.

Cantisano: Yes, really. Oh, I had a great experience the next year. We decided to lease this walnut orchard. Again, we were young, and we were thinking we could do anything. We had the vegetable farm, and we had a chance to lease a walnut orchard and an almond orchard. The almonds were pretty

straightforward, so we went ahead and leased them. It was really cheap. Almonds were worth *nothing* at that point in time. These were not very healthy trees, and somebody had pretty much walked away from fifteen acres of them.

And then there was this really nice walnut orchard down the street. The lady's husband had died three or four years before, and it was basically abandoned for three or four years. We didn't have a law yet for organic. You could call anything you wanted organic. It was a beautiful walnut orchard and it had flood irrigation, a lot of really good things going for it. So we went and leased this orchard. And Grandpa said, "Well," (and he was a walnut farmer) he said, "I don't think you're going to be able to grow these without pesticides." There were two bugs that they had, the walnut aphid and the walnut husk fly. So I went, "Well, I'm going to go down and find out the latest from the farm advisor." I'd never been to the farm advisor's office yet, [the] University of California farm advisor in Sutter County. I'll never forget it. The guy's name was Larry Fitch.

Integrated Pest Management

Now, I'd already farmed organically. I'd already been marketing and doing organic food for, I don't know, six years or something by that point in time. I walked in there and I told him what we were going to want to do. And I remember coming home and telling my girlfriend, who became my wife, "Kalita, there's no way. We're going to have to spray these. There's no way to farm these without chemicals. There's just no way to do it." Larry had brainwashed me in the space of probably forty-five minutes. He had convinced me that it was

impossible to farm these things without chemicals, so we were going to have complete crop loss. Well, by this point in time we'd already signed the lease. So it was kind of like, okay, we'll go down this road and see where it goes.

And honest to God, a miracle happened. That's all I can call it. We're out there working the place one day. And this guy drives up in a pick-up and he says, "Are you Bob Cantisano?" I said, "Yes." He says, "Well, I hear you're trying to farm these without chemicals." I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, I'm Bill Barnett from the University of California." I said, "Yes, Bill. That's what I'm trying to do." He said, "Well, you know, I'm working on the IPM [Integrated Pest Management] pear pest management manual, and we're trying to take pictures of beneficial insects, but we can't find any in the pear orchards. We can't find a lot of these species. We know they're there, but it's been sprayed so much in the pear orchards that we can't find these beneficials. So we're wondering if we could look around your place and see if we could find some beneficials to take pictures of?"

Well, it turned out my farm ends up with about fifteen pictures in the pear pest management manual (they don't describe that it's on vegetables or walnuts) including the cover picture of this lacewing. Anyway, so he's there. He brings this photographer and he's standing out there for a couple of days and gets all these beneficial pictures. Well, meanwhile, I didn't know hardly anything about beneficial insects at that time, but Bill knew tons. So I started picking his brain. "Hey, Bill. What are we seeing here? What is this?" And he'd say, " Well, that's a Nabis. And that's a syrphid fly and this is what they eat."

Well, I started talking to him. I said, "You know, Bill, they've got me convinced here that using chemicals is the only way I'm going to be able to farm these walnuts." He said, "Oh, do you want to do tests and do some trials?" I said, "Yes. Great. What do you want to do?" He said, "Well, I've got this idea about trapping that we use out in the forest for trapping out this beetle that attacks pines, a different species, but it's a similar idea. He said, "Maybe we could try that out here." I said, "Whatever you say, Bill. Let's give it a road test."

Well, it turned out it worked. It wasn't just that. We did a bunch of different things. But we did figure it out. We grew beautiful walnuts with very low cullage rate. Even the first year we had very little damage. And Bill was like, "Yes, this is cool." He wrote a paper about it and got it published. Because at that time there was nobody that was not spraying walnuts. It was just like, you don't do it. Chemicals were the gold standard and we proved that it was possible to farm walnuts without chemicals. It was not possible to just let nature takes its course and get a good crop. There was the need to be proactive. So we did the mass trapping, released lacewings to attack both the husk fly and the aphid, cultivated around the trees to disturb the overwintering walnut husk fly pupae that are near the soil surface under the tree, released a species of wasp that attacked the walnut, sprayed every tenth tree with a molasses-based attractant bait combined with an organic insecticide and other IPM techniques.

Well, then we became the university test plot. Oh, I know what he told us, too. They would try to do these no-spray projects and then the farmers would get nervous in the middle of the season and go spray them out and they'd lose their

trials. Finally they'd found somebody who wasn't going to go spray them out. They could actually do the research (because I guess they didn't find any other organic farmers at the time). They found somebody who would say, "I won't spray it. I'll take the damage, the risk."

So we ended up becoming the test plot for this little parasite that they brought over from Iran, this little wasp for the aphid. The aphid was a big problem, a big, big problem. Everybody was spraying for it. We had problems with it too. We'd found out that certain predators would feed on it, but there was nothing that was specific on the aphid. It was an introduced pest from Iran, because they brought walnuts over here originally from Iran, or that area, with the aphid pest and they didn't come over with their biocontrol parasite. UC professor and biocontrol entomologist Robert van den Bosch was working on this parasite from Iran. He turned out to be my guru, thank God. Bill introduced me to van den Bosch, and then it was like, oh, my God, now we have someone who is champion of what we're doing, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic.

So Van came back with this parasite and said, "Okay, you guys. We're going to put it in here." And it turned out it totally wiped out the aphid in our orchard in only one season. UC researchers spread it around other places around California in abandoned walnut groves, and it completely eliminated walnut aphid in California in the space of four years. Bang, biocontrol equals not pesticides. That was in the mid-seventies. At that point farmers were spending over a million bucks a year on pesticides for that aphid alone, in walnuts. And that one introduction, which cost like five grand, it was like nothing. They sent Van over

there. He found these parasites. He raised them up. They put them out. The things multiplied like crazy and it eliminated pesticides for that particular pest, which has never been a pest since.

Okay. So then all of a sudden now we're getting written up in journals, and I know nothing about this stuff!

Rabkin: (laughter)

Cantisano: (laughs) I'm an expert. I'm not an expert at all. I'm just a farmer, but it gave me a lot of encouragement about the possibilities, because I realized that if you found the right person with some science knowledge lots of things were possible. But at the time, even then, there were so few people doing organics that people didn't really care about organic farmers. The university had not yet given any credence of any significance, and there were just a few individuals like Van and Bill Barnett. Bill wasn't fully an organic guy, but he believed in that IPM idea, and so he believed in beneficial insects. But then we'd try to talk to them about soil management and they'd glaze over. They had no clue about soil and plant health. They're entomologists.

So partly how I ended up becoming "an expert" was because I couldn't find anybody who could give me all the pieces of the puzzle. They would give you the little segments. They knew about the weeds; they knew about the pests; they knew about the predator; they knew about the disease; they knew something about soils (but nothing, really). About soils, that was really a sad time. You got me going now, sorry.

Rabkin: It's terrific. Keep going.

Cover Cropping

Cantisano: You couldn't buy cover crop seed in the seventies. You could not buy it except at Northrup King, an international seed company that sold primarily crop seeds such as corn. They had two winter grains, oats and barley, and purple vetch. That was the only place in California you could actually buy cover crop seed. Grandpa Rouse was telling me about all these varieties he used to grow in the twenties and thirties: "You should grow Indian Sour clover. It kills the gophers." I'm like, "Okay. Let's go find *Melilotus indica*." We researched all over the place. And of course there was no Internet, so it's phone calls, mostly. And they're saying, "No, I don't have that." So we go down to the university library in Davis to learn about cover crops. Man, was that disappointing: there hadn't been a publication written on cover crops since the fifties. Not a single thing written at the university, since like '52 or something. And we're like, "Well, at least there's stuff here." And then we found this treasure trove, this book from 1928 that had all the stuff. Oh, it was an amazing book. Oh, it's *the* book! In fact, it's still the best book on cover cropping out there. It is still the best. Nothing's been written that tops it.

Rabkin: Do you remember the title or author?

Cantisano: Yes, it's called *Green Manuring*. It was first published in 1927. It's called *Green Manuring: Principles and Practice* and it's by Adrian Pieters.[10] It was,

of course, sitting in the reference section of the UC Davis library and you couldn't take it out, so I went and photocopied every page, which in 1975 cost a fortune. But fortunately, in 2004 a company in India reprinted it. So it's now in print. And it's still the best book. There's no doubt about it. I have a friend, Edwin McLeod, who wrote a book on cover cropping in the seventies titled *Feed The Soil,*[11] and he took a bunch of information directly out of the Pieters' book, because there were no current resources at the time.

Rabkin: So nothing has really superceded this in eighty years.

Cantisano: Not really. We have new varieties. But as far as the basic practices—the seeding rates, how to cultivate it, how to irrigate it, when to plant—all the basic things about cover cropping are in this book and have not been superceded. And most of the same varieties are still being grown. No, there's nothing. Now we have books that have some more details on growing covers in specific crops. Now there's something on vineyard cover cropping that's more specific. But that book *Green Manuring* is amazing in breadth and depth.

So here we had Grandpa Rouse who had farmed during this era, right? 1927. He knew all about cover crops, and this book. But no cover crop seed. It was kind of like, "Oh, great. This is a great idea, but where do you get this stuff?" So then we talked the Lundbergs into growing us some vetch and peas. That's what started that whole deal. I'm jumping ahead here, but one of the first things that Peaceful Valley Farm Supply did was get into cover crop seeds. That was its niche. Because nobody else was doing it.

California Certified Organic Farmers [CCOF]

So at any rate, we were farming there in Yuba City, and the co-ops were showing up, and these trucks were coming, and Veritable [Vegetable] was buying stuff and then— I would go travel around. It's hard to remember exactly what started when. But CCOF [California Certified Organic Farmers] started right about that time, and I was still involved in the co-op. I went to the first forming meeting of CCOF, which was down in Avila Beach. And it was a little bit of a weird vibe because I wasn't a farmer and they didn't really want anybody there who wasn't a farmer.

Rabkin: You weren't farming yet?

Cantisano: No. I was doing that two acres in Truckee, but I wasn't farming. So it was about 1972, '73. But I was a manager of this co-op and we were doing this trucking thing, so we were all connected up with all of these farmers. I went to that meeting. So I am a founding member. I was there at the very first meeting. But it was kind of odd. They really only wanted farmers. We were saying, "You need to get everybody else, because there's all this "alternative food system" that is going to buy the certified organic food. We wanted to get the truckers and the storefronts and the retailers and all the people involved." But I do remember a number of the people who were at that meeting, and a lot of those people became the original CCOF members.

But actually there was a predecessor to CCOF in California. It was run by Rodale Press. Rodale Press came out here in, I want to say '71, '72, to begin certifying organic crops grown in California. Floyd Allen was the Rodale Press guy. He came out and they did certifying for one or two seasons. They had a little logo of a sprouting seed, a sunflower coming out of the ground. And they certified a couple of people I knew, that we were buying crops from. And then Rodale, for some reason, backed out of that project. And that left this void. CCOF formed to fill the void. Some of the same people were certified by Rodale and then they decided to get together and the CCOF formation meeting happened. We were running the food co-op, and they were having a hard time with us being not farmers. So I kind of felt alienated.

But Fred Rohé, back to Fred Rohé, he, right about this same time (maybe a couple of years before), had started a trade group called Organic Merchants, OM, which was basically a certification of whether a natural foods store was in compliance with this, not yet codified rule of organics, but the basic concept of organics. That they were labeling it accurately, and also that the natural foods were really natural, and they didn't have synthetic ingredients, or colorants, or preservatives—those kinds of things. So they were the first trade group, as far as I know, maybe in the United States, certainly in Northern California. Our co-op was a member of OM and there were a lot of others. They should have worked a lot more closely together. There was a lot of opportunity to do it, but they didn't. OM was kind of its own thing and CCOF was kind of its own thing.

But then we moved to Yuba City. That was the second year of CCOF, I think. We became certified down there. But the rules then were very simple. It was mostly the "don't" rules. You couldn't use this, that, or the other thing. There were just a couple of pages of regulations. And you got certified by another farmer in CCOF who came over and inspected you. There was a handshake. I can't remember what you paid, but you paid a few bucks and you were off and running. We got inspected by a guy who was a corn farmer. He knew nothing about growing vegetables. It was kind of an interesting phenomenon. The next year a rice farmer inspected us. That's how it was. That's how casual the relationship was at that point.

So CCOF was in its infancy and it really didn't do a whole lot other than give you the certification seal. Except David Katz (who is somebody else that people should probably interview at some point), put together the CCOF newsletter, and that was kind of the glue. David was also a farmer at the time, in Winters, Odyssey Orchards. The newsletter got people aware of what was going on between the different farms and also had a list of who the farms were. There was a pretty crude office at the time. Barney Bricmont, I believe, was the one in charge at that moment. Barney was not very good at office stuff. He was a really good guy and he was a farmer, but the office was not his forte. We used to call it the Black Hole.

Rabkin: (laughs)

Cantisano: You'd send stuff to Barney and it would never come back, or never get dealt with. We knew it wasn't because he didn't want to. It just wasn't his style. And I can remember the guy who was the first president. His name was Cal Slewing. Cal was a lawyer from San Rafael who owned a ranch up by Redding. He'd grown some garlic. Elephant garlic was his little niche. But he was more the business lawyerly guy, and he kind of took the whole thing over because he was more business-like. And here I am, this wild hippie. I didn't really feel comfortable in that group.

I had strong affinity with the group from Sunburst Farm. Sunburst was in Santa Barbara and it was a Christian hippie commune, but it was a very large hippie commune of mostly people interested in agriculture. They did a lot of farming, and they were some of the group that David Posner brought this stuff up from the South Coast, the Central Coast and brought it into Santa Cruz and San Francisco. Their head farmer was Helmut Klauer, who is still a farmer. Helmut was a really nice guy, and I got along with him right away. We could see eye-to-eye. This was a really nice, hip farmer who was interested in the idea of having an organization and doing good social work, as well as the practical or the farming part. And then there was a bunch of other people around. I can't remember them all, but there were a lot of people at that first meeting. It felt really good with the people I felt good with, and then the other ones—okay, I guess I don't fit.

The Thriving Food Co-op Movement

By this time, co-ops were going crazy. There were hundreds of them in California, it seemed like.

Rabkin: Is this still the early seventies?

Cantisano: Probably mid-seventies by now. Like '75, '76, in there. Co-ops are just everywhere. There's a storefront in almost every little town around at this point. Of course then there's distributing companies. And there's this San Francisco common operating warehouse that starts up in the City, down there on Alabama Street in the Mission, at this giant old warehouse, some bakery that they had basically taken over, and had all these little businesses running in it. Veritable Vegetable was one, and there was a cheese company, and there was an herb and spice company, and there was a bakery. That bakery is still going. That's Vital Vittles. Veritable, I think, is the only other business out of that era that's still going. Then there was a general warehouse that sold dry-goods stuff. So again, you'd meet people there. That's the first place I ran into Peter Rudnick, who was the farmer for Green Gulch Zen Center in Marin County. You'd kind of meet these people. We were unloading stuff off the dock. We were both unloading produce from our farms: "Oh, well, what are you doing and where are you?" That's how a lot of people met. You'd meet them at projects, at businesses.

So at any rate, then we had this Northern California co-op group, the Northern California Cooperative Association. It was basically a trade association that met

quarterly around the North State, and I was the president of it for a couple of years. We started a little newspaper called *On the Market*, which was a trade journal telling people when things were seasonally available, good deals on stuff, helping co-ops find connections: here's a good place to buy almonds, and here's a farm that's specializing in this, and— So we kind of became, for a while there anyway, the trade journal for the organic business. That went on until about the early 1980s, and then that folded up.

The co-ops, of course, were starting to peak by that time, too. But there were all these storefronts, so there was all this demand. So we bought an almond huller and started doing our own shelling and hulling of almonds. We went and had the walnuts cracked out, and got them cracked and sorted so we could sell them as walnut meats, ready to eat. The broken pieces of almonds got processed into almond butter, and the walnut pieces got sold to bakeries, etc. We were trying to do all the stuff, be vertically integrated.

Then we had an apple orchard for a while. That was a really hard one. That was something we did not figure out how to do. Organic codling moth pest control in the seventies was not very successful. It took a few more years before we figured that one out. But we did eventually figure the pest out and controlled it without pesticides.

Rabkin: And who is "we" at this point?

Cantisano: Well, it was my [now] wife Kalita. And Gus Rouse, and Monty Rouse, and Linda Rouse, Monty's wife. And a whole group of characters that

came in and out at varying times, mostly co-op friends and members. Occasionally we would hire one or two Hispanic people who lived in the neighborhood, when we got behind. Hernando was the main guy. He was just this amazing guy. It gave me all this respect for Mexicans. I'd grown up around them. I'm Hispanic. But just getting into agriculture and working with them, it was like, oh, my God. These guys can laugh and chat and work around you like way fast. We were just talking about it the other day. The other people involved were Richie Marks and Lee May.

Picking collectives used to show up. There were groups that would actually go out and pick orchards and come help with harvest. Those usually were city-based folks who were looking to get a contact into the country. We were the back-to-the-land types. So they were like, "Wow! This is really cool. Let's go check out this farm." They'd come show up at this farm. They'd be there for a day, or two, or three.

We had some hilarious stories. Once there was this school from Sacramento, Desiderata, which was an alternative high school, that was real popular then. Everybody was into these alternative schools. They had about fifteen teenagers who would show up in this bread van to come pick. Well, Yuba City was and is very conservative country. All my neighbors were tried-and-true Republicans. We were the only hippies in the neighborhood. This is a little bit challenging, but we have good relationships with them. But they came to pick the apple or the peach orchard. Well, the girls all take their tops off in the orchard. Because they're like: liberation. This is the beginning of Women's Liberation. And the

girls are like, "We're going to be liberated. If you guys can work with your tops off, so can we." So they'd be out there and it would just flip out the neighbors.

Rabkin: (laughs)

Cantisano: Some of them loved it, but other neighbors just flipped out. Oh, my God! It was hilarious. So we had that kind of stuff going on.

There was another commune that was farming grapes in the desert. So we'd go down there and learn about grapes from them. They were called the Desert Center Collective. It turned out that was a bunch of the farmers from the Hog Farm, Wavy Gravy and Company. And then that formed a trucking company, and they started hauling stuff from us down to them, and then we'd get grapes from them, and then we'd get a picking collective and go down and pick. It was fun, wild times. We worked nonstop, 24-7, but—

So at any rate, so then '77 rolls around, and Grandpa Rouse decided he wanted to move onto his property.

Rabkin: He's been living—

Cantisano: He's been living in the Santa Clara Valley, and he was getting evicted because they were putting a cloverleaf for the freeway, and they condemned the property. Then it turned out they didn't put the cloverleaf in. They made it into a county park. But meanwhile, he got evicted.

Rabkin: And he's in his eighties at this point?

Cantisano: Yes, he's probably like mid-eighties at this point. And still farming. He was one of these farm-until-you-die kinds of guys. So he decides he wants to move back up, and there's not really room for Grandpa Rouse and us on the same property.

Now, by this time my oldest daughter had been born. She was born in '75. And we got to know someone here in Nevada City who was the sister-in-law of a guy who was an acupuncturist. He was an herbalist-acupuncturist-doctor, which was a very unusual combo in 1975. Doctors did not do herbs and acupuncture. He was an MD. Anyway, Stan Johnson had this property up here and he wanted to see it farmed. So we talked with him and he said, "Well, okay, if you guys can find a place to live you can farm here. You could haul a trailer up here." There really wasn't anyplace to live.

By that time we'd been sprayed a bunch in Yuba City. That's the other part. Yuba City was a spray nightmare. And we were pregnant with our twins, our second pregnancy. There were almost no rules regarding pesticide applications. So you could spray anywhere. And they *were*. I remember that one summer there was rain during the peach harvest season, and they came in with aerial fungicide sprays and sprayed the whole neighborhood. We were just dosed. There was no respect for neighbors. It was also the era when there were no restrictions on rice burning. So the rice fields would just be burnt non-stop for many weeks. The air would be black for months on end in the fall.

Rabkin: And was this spraying contaminating your farm?

Cantisano: Yes. I'm sure it was. We didn't have any proof one way or the other. But how could it not be? It was right next door, and they were doing it from the air. So I'm sure it was. But it was contaminating *us*. We knew we were drinking contaminated water because we were out in an area that was all farmed heavily, and had a lot of light soils, so stuff was down in the well water.

So at any rate, we wanted to get out of the valley even before Grandpa Rouse said, "It's time to go." He was real nice about it. He even said we could stay longer. But then this deal came up. So we moved up here.

So we leased this property, which was 150 acres. And of that we farmed about six of it. The rest of it was forest and pasture. Then a couple of those people that were in that picking collective moved up there with us, so we had five of us. We started farming and then I had my twins. That kind of got us off on a whole other tangent: kids. But we had started farming.

Peaceful Valley Farm Supply

(I'm telling you this to give you a sense of the Peaceful Valley genesis.)

Rabkin: Yes.

Cantisano: We were at Peaceful Valley Farm. That was the name of it. We had been extremely lucky farming in Yuba City, because the ground was already naturally fertile, and outside of making the dumb mistakes with the rice hulls—(laughs), once we made the compost and got the cover crop thing working, we could grow stuff really well. It was a huge, long season, I mean, just tremendous.

We had no idea of how good we had it because we just didn't have any other experience, other than Truckee, which was poor soil and poor climate, but it was a smaller-scale thing. We didn't really have a sense of it.

So we moved to Nevada City and it's lousy soil, just absolutely horrible. The texture is okay, but there's just no fertility in it. It's leached, red, acidic, low-organic-matter soils. Then I had to become knowledgeable about soils. Before that, I was going with what I learned from Grandpa, and my grandma, and what I read in these books. Now I'm like, well, that ain't enough to do it around here. I gotta to figure out something else.

So I started doing soil sampling, soil tests. (laughs) It's funny. I can kind of look back and go, "Well, I'm the guy that started that trend." Because there wasn't a lab in California at the time that would do it for a farmer. You could get it done for an industrial project. But they weren't doing soil testing. So I sent the samples to a place in Nebraska, which subsequently I and other people made so much business for that they opened a lab in California.

Rabkin: So you were just collecting soil samples and sending them off to this lab in Nebraska?

Cantisano: Yes, off our farm initially. Yes, just to find out what was going on. And coming back with, oh, no wonder nothing grows. There are absolutely just no nutrients in this ground. So, at least I had this starting point of what that meant when there were no nutrients. But then, how do you actually solve that

problem? Deal with phosphorus and zinc and sulfur and calcium and nitrogen, which I had not, to that point in time, had to really think about.

So I got started doing bookwork. Fortunately, I had hitchhiked— (laughs) I had no money. We were so far below the poverty line it was just ridiculous. I had hitchhiked to Kansas City to go to the Acres USA conference. *Acres USA magazine* had put [this] on for about two or three years.[12] They had started doing this conference in Kansas. It was the only conference on organic farming in the country at the time, the only one I had heard about. They were publishing this magazine, and they were talking about all these different ways to fertilize. They also had reprinted a couple of books by this soil professor from Missouri, William Albrecht.[13] He was the originator of a whole bunch of concepts which now have become commonplace. At the time, his ideas were still not completely validated. But anyway, they had republished these books and it had a lot of stuff about balancing cations, and about calcium, and also some stuff about how to do it organically. So I hitchhiked back there. I met a couple of organic farmers. They were telling me what they were doing with his ideas. And I went, well, okay, I'm going to just do this. I'll take these soil tests and I'll start experimenting.

So I started bringing in different minerals and composts and cover crops, and trying to figure out what we could do. It turned out the biggest limiter was phosphorus. I just could not get enough phosphorus in the ground. There was only one chicken ranch locally, and there really wasn't a good source of phosphorus. The ground was really, really low in phosphorus everywhere. And it's, like, critical. It has this huge impact on root development, and flower

development, and sugar development, and seed development, and photosynthesis. So obviously, if you didn't have enough phosphorous you were going to have problems. And of course everybody around here was using chemicals; you could easily buy chemical phosphorus. All the chemical farmers, that's what they did. That was the other way I learned, too, was to find out what the chemical guys were using but not use the chemicals.

So phosphorus was like, indispensable. So I went, okay, let's find some phosphate. I found a guy in Marin County who ran an organic garden center [that he claimed also served farmers], but it was really a gardeners' store.

Rabkin: Where in Marin County was it?

Cantisano: It was in Sausalito. Right next to the docks, right next to where all the houseboats are. [This guy] was the ultimate space case. Now, I had dealt with many dozens of business people, but he set a new standard, and it wasn't a good one. I had started two businesses, a farm and a non-profit. Now I was on this new farm. So I actually was on my fourth business. So I had learned a bit about business management and relationships. I never was taught any business, but I had learned the basics of operating a moderately successful business—if you say you're going to do something you do it, or you let somebody know if it's not going to work out. If you say you've got something in stock, you make sure you have it when they show up, or whatever. We'd call [him up] and he'd rarely answer the phone. You'd get an answering service (because I don't think there were even answering machines then). You'd get an answering service and we'd

say, "We need this-and-this." You'd call him again and he'd say, "Oh yeah, come on down." We'd drive down there and he wouldn't have it. This was a long drive, you know.

Rabkin: From Nevada City to Sausalito.

Cantisano: Yes. Or sometimes we'd get down there sometimes and he'd be closed on a weekday. He just didn't come to work. It was just like, man, what is this guy's trip? Well, so then he says, "Okay, I'm going to bring in some rock phosphate." I go, "Great," because we needed soft rock phosphate. It turned out to be the right material. So he brought in this rail car from Florida, as it turned out, and he was so spaced out that he kept sending us to the wrong places to go meet the car. He'd say, "Oh, it's going to be over in such-and-such on Tuesday." And then we'd drive over there and there's no car there.

Rabkin: (laughter)

Cantisano: So we went over to Woodland, and we went over to Chico, and we went someplace else. He just didn't have his act together at all, and it was really frustrating. So I finally got the phosphate and I put it on the ground, and that was that fall. And bang. The cover crop grew. I got nitrogen fixation. It was green. And I went, well, this is what it was like in Yuba City. So I knew that I was on the right track material-wise, but I was totally bummed about dealing with this guy as a businessman. And we had a couple of more like that and it was just like, man, you suck!

Rabkin: (laughs)

Cantisano: I tried to give him the benefit of the doubt because he was the only person in Northern California who was stocking organic stuff at the time. He was the only guy. But he wasn't used to selling to farmers. He had had a gardener clientele. And we needed volume. So it just didn't work. He was just SO unbusiness-like: "Where've you been?" "Oh, I've been out riding my mountain bike on Mount Tam." "Well, great, Dude. We've been waiting here two and a half hours for you." "Oh, wow. I didn't realize you were going to be here today." I mean, just like that, after he'd told us to come at eight o'clock. We'd show up at eight o'clock and it was like, "Oh, yeah. I've been out riding my bike." I was never quite sure what his problem was. Anyway, he was in business in spite of himself.

So I got totally frustrated. And that winter I said, I am going to do something about this disaster. By that time I knew all the organic farmers here in the foothills and all the ones in the Valley. There were so few it wasn't hard to get to know them. So I called them up and I said, "I need more rock phosphate for our farm." Because we had just bought enough for a half an acre, just to see if it worked. And it worked. I said, "I want to buy six or seven or eight tons of it."

But it was a forty-ton boxcar. That was the only way you could buy it. Forty tons of fifty-pound bags, 1600 bags. I said, "But if you go in with me, we'll buy as much as we can." So I got about eighteen or nineteen tons of it sold before I placed the order. I just went for it. I borrowed the money from the doctor,

because I didn't have any money. I said, "I'll get it back to you." (He had some money.) He knew. He'd seen the effect of the phosphate. He knew it was a good idea for his place. So thank you Stan Johnson, may you rest in peace, for loaning us the business money that got Peaceful Valley Farm Supply started. He didn't know that he was starting a farm supply. He just thought he was buying us some rock phosphate.

So we bought the rock phosphate and it came on a rail heading in Colfax. But what they didn't tell me was that it didn't come on pallets. It was all stacked on the bed of the boxcar—1600 bags. We had to pick up by hand bag after bag after bag—1600 50-pound bags, and put them on pallets and put them on a truck and drive them back over here. So at any rate, we only had about half of it sold, but I knew I needed it, and I knew I wasn't going to deal with [the store in Marin] anymore. So I bought it and I went for it. Well, that was, without even knowing it, the beginning of Peaceful Valley Farm Supply. I put it in the barn, filled up a bunch of rooms. Stan was bummed. I was like, "Stan, I can't leave it out in the rain." "Okay, okay." So we moved a bunch of stuff around, and we moved this in there. And by the next spring I said, "Okay, now I'm going to sell this, Stan." So I put a little sign up in town. Oh, and I got interviewed for the local alternative newspaper because I was the only organic farmer around here, and they did a story on organic farms.

Rabkin: So these other guys who were buying the rock phosphate weren't organic farmers?

Cantisano: They weren't from right in this area. There was one in Sierra County. There were two in Placer County. There was one by Yuba City. There was one down by Sacramento. But I was the only one in our county at the time.

At any rate, that got me started as a business. So we opened up a Saturday morning. Peaceful Valley—eight to noon you could come out. Then I just kind of went, oh, well I need this for my farm. And as I said about the cover-crop story, I had the Lundbergs grow some more cover crop seed; they bagged it up and we sold it. Then I went and contracted with another guy, and he grew us some bell beans, and another guy grew some fava beans. Next thing you know I had more than I needed, and I started brokering that out and selling it to a couple of seed companies. Then finally that got some interest in cover crops, to the point where seed growers would actually grow them again, and then you could start actually buying those things.

So Peaceful Valley actually grew out of a need, as opposed to: "Oh, I'm going to be a businessman. I want to have another business." I couldn't find this stuff. I wanted biodynamic preparations for my compost piles. Nobody had them. So I went and cut a deal with the BD guys in New York and they said, "Sure, we'll sell it to you. And if you buy this much you can get it wholesale." It was like, well, okay, I guess I'll be in the BD prep business. It was literally that— You know, then it was kelp. I needed kelp for trace minerals for the soil and the animals. We'd started using kelp meal and Maxicrop, which [the guy in Marin] had turned us onto. But he would be out of it a lot. He'd show up and say, "Oh,

no. I don't have any." You know, once you start using something you want to be diligent about it.

So I ended up calling his supplier. "Sure, yeah. He is really hard to deal with. I'll be happy to sell you some." Anyway, that grew into a business. It just was there half a day a week for the first couple of years, and then we opened it up to, I think it was two days a week.

Rabkin: And at this point you're just selling stuff informally out of your barn?

Cantisano: Yes. Then I made the mistake of publishing a price list. All of a sudden, as soon as I did that, the business went crazy! I was farming, but the business jumped up. This was also at a time when there was a lot more people interested in organics. And, as it turned out, we were the only people. [The store in Marin] had gone out of business by this point. We were *it*. They were selling a little bit of stuff at General Feed and Seed in Santa Cruz. They had a few things, but not very much. And we had a pretty good selection of your basic organic stuff.

Rabkin: And that was *it* for California?

Cantisano: As far as I know. We were getting business from all over California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Nevada, Arizona, Hawaii. We were getting calls from everywhere! And because we were hooked up with the Mountain People's Trucking deal, we had a way to truck stuff to people because they were trucking all over the West Coast. So it was kind of a natural. It was like, okay, if you need

a big volume of this we could get it to you at a very reasonable trucking rate. Then we started bringing truckloads of this and that, and moving stuff all over the state and the West Coast. I don't think there was anybody else. I know there was a guy in Washington. I remember hearing about him. But I don't think there was anybody else on the West Coast doing organic farm supplies. Garden supplies. You could go, like I said, to General Feed and Seed and buy some gardening things. But farming stuff, no. We were kind of the first.

Then we started doing equipment, and that kept snowballing. I had to go rent a building up the hill from the farm because we had now outgrown the farm's barn. We were at the end of a dirt road, kind of like this one. So people would be driving in there and the neighbors didn't like it. So we moved up closer to town. Then we used to get the forty-foot trailer stuck in the road, and the neighbors would be really upset. So finally we moved it into town, and into a place that was not a problem physically.

Rabkin: Is that where it is now?

Cantisano: It's in its third location since it went to town. It just kept growing. I sold that business in 1989.[14] But that's also how I got to know a lot of those Central Coast people, between the CCOF, the food buying club and Peaceful Valley.

Then that co-op warehouse movement group used to hold meetings regularly in Santa Cruz. So I'd go down to Santa Cruz. I met Russel Wolter probably around 1975 or 1976.[15] To my knowledge, Russel was the only real vegetable farmer at

that time doing organic. Everybody else was kind of market-gardener scale. Russel had forty acres and was actually farming organic vegetables. But it was funny, because he didn't know he had been doing anything unusual (i.e. farming organically) because he had always farmed that way, as he learned from his father; just a few years before somebody had said, "Oh, you're doing organic farming." But he didn't know that. He just—they never used chemicals, you know. Then all of a sudden *organic* became a hip phrase and he started shipping through a distributor.

So I went and hung out with Russel. And Russel and I hit it right off, even though we're total opposites politically, and he's twenty years older than I am, but the fact that I could hang out and we could talk agriculture—we had a lot in common. It was like being around Grandpa Rouse, as an older mentor. But this guy was organic. It was like, cool, you know. We'd talk cover crops, and using manure. (This was before most people were doing compost. Russel wasn't a composter. He was a manure user.)

And then I would meet all these other unusual characters like Bill Denevan. We've got to give credit where credit is due. Bill is definitely the first orchardist around there, an organic, legitimate one. There are other people claiming, but Bill was actually doing it. That was interesting. That was sort of a commune property that he was first farming, Happy Valley. That was a commune kind of a scene and he was farming there. We hit it off. I liked him. He liked me. But he was doing orchard crops, and by this time I wasn't doing any orchards up here. I was just doing vegetables and flowers and berries.

Rabkin: When you say that there was a group that met in Santa Cruz, was that because Russel Wolter was down there, or Bill Denevan, or Barney Bricmont[16]?

Cantisano: No, that was the buying clubs and co-ops that were meeting, and then CCOF would have meetings there occasionally. But CCOF wasn't really into organizing the farmers, which was, I thought, actually its downfall. It was actually the reason I started the Eco-Farm Conference, because CCOF didn't. What needed to happen was that people needed to network, and they needed to get to know each other. There were very few people in this. So no, the farmers hardly ever met. It was really rare. They just didn't meet. It was more the activists, and the retailers, and the wholesalers, distributors, processors. Those were the people who would show up at meetings. I think farmers aren't that interested in meetings generally, and meetings weren't geared to them either. So they just weren't around much.

So no, Santa Cruz meetings were mostly for the food-buying clubs and the co-ops. But then I'd go out and visit farms, because I was there with dual interests: the farming part and the food co-op. Because I still was active in our food co-op, but I just wasn't living there.

Rabkin: Who was in Santa Cruz that brought the food-buying co-op meeting to that area?

Cantisano: You know, it was a group of women. Clarice Lusk was one of them. She eventually married Albert from Albert's Organics.[17] And there was a woman named Vivian. I don't think I ever knew her last name. They had a business, a

trucking collective, Santa Cruz Trucking. They were one of the ones that people used to meet in the City. They'd bring the Santa Cruz and Central Coast products up, and haul stuff back and forth. It was like four or five women, is what I remember. There was a group of them. Lauren was another one. They were activist women, feminists. That was the whole thing. Veritable Vegetable hadn't become a feminist collective yet, but it was on its way. Maybe by then it had. That was started out as men and women, and then women took that over. And then there was Sunflower, a feminist trucking co-op out of Oregon. They used to haul stuff down in a forty-foot semi. They were hard to deal with. It was friction a lot of times. Well, you know. You were there. Us men who had come from that fifties, sixties upbringing, we had to get it beat over our head a few times before we really got it. So sometimes things would go a little awry, and things would get testy and stuff. It was great in general working with them, but I know Sunflower had a reputation for taking no shit. They were pretty hard core to deal with. They laid it right on you if you screwed up.

But anyway, so that was the Central Coast group. Not so much with farmers. I do remember a few meetings with farmers, but they were kind of rare then. They weren't happening very often.

Rabkin: So we're kind of at that juncture in your life where the farm supply business has taken off, and you sell it in '89, and you're transitioning into being a farm advisor at that point?

Cantisano: Yes, there are a couple of things going on there simultaneously. Peaceful Valley had gotten unruly. I had sixteen employees. It was out of control. I wanted to farm. I didn't intend to run a farm supply for my life. I wanted to farm. I was still playing around with farming, but it was a very, very part-time thing. Honestly, I had totally lost interest in running a farm supply. The other thing that was happening was that more and more farmers were calling up and wanting very complicated, detailed conversations that really weren't appropriate to running a business that was already maxed out and trying to serve too many people out of a little tiny retail business. I kept finding myself frustrated because I couldn't really, a) fully learn what they were really interested in, and b) give them a really satisfactory answer. I wasn't a farm advisor, but I became the de facto organic advisor. People would call up and go, "Well, what do you do about this?" and I'm like, "Well, this is what I've been doing, or this is what one of my clients has been doing." Or I'd go research it and find out. I'd write down a note and I'd say, "Well, I don't know enough about that, but I'll get back to you." Well, because we were the only farm supply at the time (or at least seemed to be) that would even give these men or women lip service, I would be getting more and more calls from people. I don't know how they were finding us. We were getting written up in all kinds of places: *Sunset [Magazine],* and the *[San Francisco] Chronicle* wrote a big article about us, and the *Sacramento Bee* had a big article. We were in *Organic Gardening Magazine* a bunch of times. I guess there weren't many of us doing this stuff. So bit-by-bit, they kept showing up and calling around. But again, this is the late seventies, early eighties.

Founding the Eco-Farm Conference

So in 1980—by this time I've got quite a long list of people that I know, and customers. I was frustrated. I'd gone at least one more time to the Acres USA meeting in Kansas, and they weren't really what I wanted either. It was a Midwest vibe. It was more grains, soybeans, and cattle. I really wanted to see the people in California get together and get to know each other. I was sort of the pollinator. I'd be talking to these people, or go visit them when I'd go on a trip somewhere. Turned out they didn't even know there was another organic farmer down the street. It was kind of like, that's sort of nuts.

So one not very busy December night I thought, let's organize a meeting. So I called up a couple of my friends—Martin Barnes, who was farming in Capay Valley, and George Stevens, who was farming also in Capay Valley, and I said, "Hey, you guys, what do you think about having a meeting? " Closest to me, that was where the most organic farmers were, right in that Yolo County area. I said, "I'd like to put together a meeting, just get together, and let's just have a speaker or two and just see what happens." And Martin was like, "Yes, okay. I actually know somebody who is a fireman in Winters. They rent their fire hall out." So I said, "All right. I've got a list of a bunch of names, and I'll use my mailing list, and I'll just mail to all these people and see what happens."

So we got this date in February and we invited Everett "Deke" Dietrick from Rincon Vitova Insectary, who was the pioneering supplier of beneficial insects, and was one of my mentors.[18] Bill Barnett introduced me to him. Bill said, "Well,

you need these Trichogramma wasps (for another problem I was trying to deal with in the peaches) and here's the place to buy it." So I ended up dealing with Deke. He ended up being this great, grandfatherly kind of guy, and it was really interesting, because again—I was a fairly knowledgeable, business-oriented kind of guy, he was a super-knowledgeable entomologist dedicated to biological control, and eventually I became a distributor for his bugs. So we got to be really good friends as the bugs worked for our clients. He came and spoke to the conference. He was the only speaker, but he fired up the crowd. We had about sixty people show up, share lunch and network.

Rabkin: Were you calling it the Ecological Farming Conference at that point?

Cantisano: No. It wasn't called Eco-Farm for a couple more years. It was titled "To Husband the Earth."

Rabkin: Do you think of this meeting as the predecessor of Eco-Farm?

Cantisano: Oh yes, definitely. It's what started it.

Rabkin: And this was what, 1981?

Cantisano: 1980. George's wife, Sarah Atkinson, made a poster for it, and we got it around. We got some help from Davis from a group called California Agrarian Action Project (CAAP), which is a parent of CAFF [Community Alliance with Family Farmers]. CAAP eventually became the California Action Network, and there was the Agrarian Action Project. And they merged and became CAN. And CAN became CAFF down the road a ways.

But at any rate, they came and helped doing some of the logistics, like typed up the names of everybody. We had people from all over California. Jerry Thomas[19], who I had met before, he came. We had people from Southern California. There was one lady from Oregon that I remember. And then obviously most people were from the general vicinity. We had a simple lunch. And you know, that started it.

So I said, "Do we want to do this again?" and everybody went, "Yes." I was the organizer of it, really. It wasn't a big thing to do it. But getting farmers to actually follow through on that is difficult. They're busy. So the next year I did it again. I could already tell by the feedback we'd gotten that we needed a bigger space. I called my friend Kate Burroughs of Harmony Farm Supply in Sebastopol and asked, "Kate, you know any places out by you where we could hold another meeting?" I knew there was a lot of interest in the North Coast in organics. She said, "Yes, I think there's this church camp out here we could rent." So she went and rented the church camp.[20]

Rabkin: This was in Occidental?

Cantisano: Occidental. And we put on the second one. That one just— It blew our minds! We had no idea. It was a one-day deal. We did get better publicity. I don't know how we got it out, but we got it out to a lot more places. And I actually had a program. We had six or seven speakers. Almost two hundred and fifty people showed up! It swamped us: "Oh, my God! Now what do we do?"

We unleashed the thing. It went from this little intimate group of sixty-odd, to this much huger group.

Rabkin: (laughs) Do you remember some of the speakers at that conference?

Cantisano: Miguel Altieri. Bill Olkowski. We ought to find out where Bill went. Bill is actually one of the founders of the organic ag movement. He was a professor of biological control at Berkeley with [Robert] van den Bosch. He's an IPM biological control specialist. His wife's name is Helga. She was also a biological control specialist. Anyway, he spoke. Lloyd Andres who was from the USDA bio control of weeds laboratory. He's retired now. He lives out in Capay. Bill Strockmeyer, who was from the National Farmers Organization, the NFO, which was organizing farmers into a union [spoke]. He was the radical rabble-rouser type. And I spoke. Oh, and we had a lady from the Price-Pottenger Foundation. Price-Pottenger is the parent of what is now the Weston Price Foundation. Dr. Pottenger was really big in researching the concept of eating raw foods, raw milk and raw meat, and that started the whole Sally Fallon-led movement of raw foodists. *Nourishing Traditions*[21] comes right out of Pottenger's. The woman from Price-Pottenger came up and showed a movie featuring the Price Pottenger research on feeding cats a raw versus processed diet. The movie also featured Dr. William Albrecht. I don't remember who else spoke.

The conference was a raging hit, just, like, whoa, this is a hot deal. Meanwhile, this is still my private venture. I'd funded it all.

Rabkin: So you were no longer living way below the poverty line at this point?

Cantisano: Yes, Peaceful Valley Farm Supply was paying the bills. The farm was still struggling as a farm, but the farm supply was making money. It wasn't a huge amount of money. I actually borrowed money from other businesses to put that event on, from Harmony and Fowler Brothers. Which is another one that deserves mention in the group of founders of the organic movement in Northern California: Terry and Bryan Fowler, Fowler Brothers Distributing in San Rafael. They got a lot of the Santa Cruz growers up and running, because they were the major trucker out of that area up to the Bay Area and farther. And they hauled a lot of stuff down to Santa Cruz. They were a major supplier to the natural food stores down there. Anyway, the Fowlers loaned money, and Rincon Vitova. So they all loaned the money, and then when I took in money at the door I paid them all back. We had enough money that I could take my kids and wife, and we spent one night in Bodega Bay.

Rabkin: (laughs) That was your vacation reward.

Cantisano: (laughs) I remember that was a big deal. It was our vacation from the money we made. But it was fun.

Rabkin: How did you feed all those people?

Cantisano: Oh, that was a trip. That's an interesting story in and of itself. The first one, I think we just made sandwiches, or something very simple. A sandwich and a salad or something. Either my wife or some of the other women and men made it. But for the one in Occidental, we contracted with them to do it

and we told them what we wanted, and it turned out nothing like what we wanted. It was like industrial-to-the-max, horrible food.

Rabkin: This was the church camp kitchen?

Cantisano: Yes, the church camp. Terrible. Absolutely terrible. That happened again. But let me tell you how Eco-Farm got going and then I'll tell you about the third year.

Maybe that year is the year I called it the Ecological Farming Conference. I can't remember if it was that year, or the third year. I wanted to call it something that was all-inclusive, so that non-organic farmers would feel comfortable with attending. "Organic" had a lot of heavy stigma on it at that point and "ecological" sounded more benign in some way.

Rabkin: I have something in my notes from the website, about the Eco-Farm website, the Steering Committee for Sustainable Agriculture?

Cantisano: Yes. Now that came up after we called it the Ecological Farming Conference. So okay, I guess that's right. I guess the second one *was* called the Ecological Farming Conference, because then, at the end of that day—and it was late—we were there until eight o'clock. It was a long day. It was a twelve-hour meeting. It was a big deal. I can remember still how powerful it was. People were thrilled at meeting everybody. It was the first time really anything sizeable had been targeted at organic farmers.

And so right towards the end, I said something like (because I was the moderator) and I said, "Well, I want this to happen again. I want to do another one of these. But I really don't want to be the only person running it, and I think it's about time for it to move into something besides me doing it." Elizabeth Martin, aka Izzy Martin, who at the time was running the Agrarian Action Project, jumped up and said, "Let's form a steering committee!" And then a number of people signed up for that. Then we said, "Steering Committee? Well, what does that mean?"

Rabkin: (laughter)

Cantisano: And just then that book had just come out that was edited by Richard Merrill, *Radical Agriculture*.[22] He was a professor at Cabrillo College and had just edited this book that had used the word sustainable liberally in it. So somebody said, "Well, sustainable. Let's call it the Committee for Sustainable Agriculture." That book had just come out. It was literally weeks or months before. It was hot on everybody's mind. There were a lot of famous people in that book. It was quite the popular book at the moment. So we called it the Steering Committee for Sustainable Agriculture.

So that's how that got going. Then we eventually turned it into the Committee for Sustainable Agriculture, because that was such a mouthful. And then eventually in the late nineties, it became the Ecological Farming Association. The group that volunteered at the second conference organized to put the next conference together, which was held in La Honda in 1981.

But at any rate, let me tell you about the food. You've been to Eco-Farm? The food is pretty good there now, right?

Rabkin: Yes.

Cantisano: Okay. So the third year we've outgrown Christian camp. We're totally not coming back to the Christian camp because the group's too big. And we decide we want to do a two-day event. One day is just not enough. We are going to do a two-day event. So we need places for people to stay. So we look around, and someone, and I don't remember who, finds this YMCA camp in La Honda, up above Palo Alto.

Rabkin: Jones Gulch.

Cantisano: Jones Gulch. And so we went there. My wife and I went down there and talked to them. Because even though it was like a committee, we were still running a lot of the little details of it. So we went down and talked to them and we said, "Look, this is what we want. This is a bunch of organic farmers and we're all into natural foods and we want you to make fresh-from-scratch organic, vegetarian meals." And they said, "Oh, sure. Fine. We can do that. Sure, no problem." And my wife is like, "Do you need some recipes?" "Oh, no. We can do that."

So now we get our act together with the advertising, and we've got this bigger population. By this time CCOF has grown up, and we're using their mailing list. And CAN has a mailing list, so we've got quite a bit of names, and Rodale Press

gave us a mailing list. We had a few others. Peaceful Valley had thousands of customers at this point. We had quite a few people to mail to. So we knew we were going to get a pretty good-sized audience, and we put together a pretty whizz-bang show. I don't remember who all was on it, but it was pretty hot. I think this place held four hundred, I think, was its limit, something like that.

Well, we sold out like in an instant. We didn't even take pre-reservations. We just were taking phone calls, people saying, "Yes, I'll come and I want to bring this person and that person." We didn't have any way to take reservations really, or do money at that point. SCSA [the Steering Committee for Sustainable Agriculture] was a project of the California Institute for Rural Studies. They were actually the umbrella nonprofit organization. So we were this little business, a nonprofit underneath them. But they weren't really set up to handle events. They had done all their money to come in through grants. This was a whole new ballgame for them. So they said, "Just take the money at the door and we'll figure out how to work this thing out."

So anyway, we get swamped. Tons of folks show up, of course all wanting to spend the night. This facility is not by any stretch of the imagination ready for us. It's way over their previous experience— I mean, this is a kids' camp, you know. Here's a bunch of adults needing reasonably comfortable conditions. It was a bunch of creaky double-spring bunk beds in dorms. It was just adequate, barely. But at any rate, food. So lunch, right? Here comes lunch, the first meal. And out comes an industrial Sysco tomato soup straight out of a can with popcorn floating in it.

Rabkin: (laughter)

Cantisano: Served with Wonder Bread and processed American cheese sandwiches, grilled sandwiches. Literally Wonder Bread American. There's grumbling right away, obviously. And Kalita, who at the time is raising four children and has already got plenty on her plate, says, "That's it. We're not going to do another one of these without working with the kitchen." So we make it through this two-day event, and it's pretty awful food. There was this gummy spaghetti with ketchup-like sauce. It was horrifying. Oh, that was the other thing. We told them we wanted vegetarian. Oh, yes. That was the *x* factor. I'd forgotten that part. We wanted vegetarian meals, and they never had really cooked vegetarian food. They were used to getting Sysco canned food and popping it out there with their pot roast or hot dogs or whatever. So it was just a total basket case.

So Kalita took over the menu development, organic food donations and taught the chefs how to cook it properly, and has run it until this day. She's actually retiring this year from it, or at least she *hopes* to be retiring from it. We literally put the training wheels on that place, taught them how to make it. She stood in the kitchen and taught them. Part of the problem then was they knew nothing about sourcing these things, so she went and sourced it all. Then that got her into getting donations, and then that thing just grew. Then we outgrew Jones Gulch. We were at Jones Gulch for five years or something.

Rabkin: My notes say the third through seventh conferences. Does that sound right?

Cantisano: That sounds about right. And during that time I was the president of the Association of Applied Insect Ecologists. One year I was also the conference coordinator. AAIE was a group of mostly entomologists and pest control advisors who were interested in IPM [Integrated Pest Management] practices. We were pushing the envelope, trying to get them interested in organic. They were actually another reason why I got the Eco-Farm going. I'd go to their meeting and say, "Well, yes, they're all talking about bugs. But nobody wants to talk about soils, or cover crops, or any of the social issues." But they were the only meetings going on in California that were at least talking about alternatives. Anyway, I became the conference chairperson one year, and I made it into a virtually all-organic conference, which pissed off most of the people who attended. Because we talked about many things instead of just pest control. I put it on at Asilomar. And even though we didn't have a very big crowd, 150- 200 people, I knew Asilomar was great. That was the second year we did the Eco-Farm at Jones Gulch, I did the AAIE meeting. So I kept coming back to the group going, "We gotta move. There's a much better place." They're like, "No, it's too fancy." Because, of course, Jones Gulch was really cheap. I don't remember what it was but it was *really* cheap. And Asilomar was expensive, relatively. And they had a lot of rules.

But finally we got to the point at Jones Gulch where it was like, no choice. It's full. There's no room. We got to go somewhere else. So I persuaded the group

that Asilomar was the next best rural option, that everything else was going to end up being in a city at a hotel, or on a university campus. Which, as it turned out, is true. There aren't any other big places that aren't one of the two.

So we moved there, and it was starting over again on the food. They had zero experience. They had never cooked anything vegetarian. They knew *nothing* about natural foods. And rarely cooked anything fresh, basically all-industrial meals. Nice guy, Eddie, he's still there, was the chef. But he was clueless, absolutely clueless. So Kalita steered him and steered him and steered him. The first couple of years it was pretty rough. And then she pretty much just steered him and steered him and steered him, until now, not only do they serve good food, but also they've become famous within their corporation. That facility is run by the Delaware Corporation.

Rabkin: They're the concessionaires for the [California] State Parks?

Cantisano: Right. And national parks, a bunch of national parks. Well, Asilomar became famous in the Delaware Corporation for being the place where you could get the natural foods meal and the vegetarian meal. They sent all their chefs and buyers over there, and Kalita trained all of them. And got paid nothing. That was really a bummer. She should have got paid big money as a consultant. She taught them all how to do this stuff. So now you can go to Yosemite and get an organic meal and a vegetarian meal, and you can go to Yellowstone, and the Capitol in D.C. That's all because of what Kalita did. And it's also because they got a younger chef in there about seven or eight years ago who was hip to cooking

with fresh. He just wasn't an institutional kind of a chef. But literally, she's the one that taught them all that, and she didn't really get ever credit for it. So now you can go anywhere in the Delaware-served park concessionaires and actually get a healthy meal, if you want.

Rabkin: So as soon as they learned this stuff from Kalita they started doing it, not just for Eco-Farm, but for their other guests as well.

Cantisano: Yes, on request. Especially with the vegetarian, initially. And then they started sourcing organic and local. But yes, when we first went there they went, "Vegetarian? Like you want a grilled cheese sandwich, or what?" Honestly. It was that basic. And then the audience broadened at Eco-Farm, and Kalita broadened the menu, and started bringing in meat to complement the vegetarian meals, and that made a lot of people happy because there were a lot of people who were bummed about not getting their meat fix. They didn't want vegetarian. The meals at Eco-Farm are a reflection of what we would eat at our house and with our friends. We were eating a mostly fresh-from-the-farm vegetarian diet, so that's what we did at the conference. We said, "Let's eat a vegetarian diet at the Eco-Farm." Well, many people came in and said, "Wait a minute. I don't eat this way." It was very difficult for a lot of people to not only eat the natural foods, but also be on a wholly vegetarian diet. So eventually Kalita made it so that there were options for everybody: meat, vegan, vegetarian, raw, wheat-free, soy-free. You name it, she created it.

So yes, Asilomar just kind of took that ball and ran with it. And now you can go in there and get an all-organic meal, or an all-vegan meal, or an all-local meal, or a raw meal. They'll do everything. Because she's thought of how to do all the different styles of cooking, or preparation anyway, and stayed on it. I've been to a lot of conferences, but that's some of the better food at a conference. Usually conference food is pretty lame; at Eco-Farm it's pretty darn good. And it's ninety-eight percent organic and the vast majority from California. That says a lot when you serve more than 7000 meals.

Rabkin: So let me ask you one more question for this round of interviewing. I wonder how you think feasting and celebration contribute to these conferences as organizing tools?

Cantisano: Oh, they're absolutely indispensable. That's the best part of them, in many ways. Because agri-culture is where we came from, a culture of agriculture. And in agriculture all around the world are feasting and celebration. But U.S. agriculture, and particularly in California, totally left that world in the fifties, sixties, and seventies. So, oh, yes! I think actually some of the best things we do are the celebratory parts of the event. And from day one, we did a dance, and we had sitting together in a circle and talking, and had a wine tasting, or had a food tasting or whatever it might be, in order to broaden people's horizons. Many farmers don't get a lot of that kind of interaction day-to-day. That was really our goal: to get them in a social environment. I think it might be the best thing we do at that event. Sure, there's a lot of knowledge transferred. But honestly, to get out there and be celebratory and be social is the best. We've had

some really interesting things written on our evaluations over the years. And one comes to mind from one of the early ones. It was something like, "You know, I've been doing this for ten years. It's lonely. I'm making no money. I've been ready to quit. I've been thinking about quitting all winter. And I came to this and it gave me the spark to want to do it again."

Rabkin: Wow.

Cantisano: And we went, okay, now this is why we should be doing this stuff. This is important. Because people need that social connection. They need to know there are other people in the boat with them. And that's what started that first one, is that I just knew that people didn't know each other. They just didn't know each other. And not to get into all the political bickering. That's no fun. At Eco-Farm, we went out of our way to make a minimal amount of it be in the bickering confrontational stuff, and most of it celebratory and educational. The best thing about Asilomar, in many ways, were those round tables for meals, because you could sit with eight or ten people and have a conversation. But yes, from day one we did square dances, all those kinds of things—walks, and the bus tours—getting people in a social environment that's supportive. Today, this is politically cool. Everybody thinks Green is in. But you got to go back twenty-eight years, and recognize that most of us were social outcasts in many ways. So to go find somebody who is in your same sphere of work and the same mental state. Maybe not politically the same (in fact a lot of them weren't)—but emotionally connected to land. Because this is before the era of big agriculture in

organics, which is a whole other series of conversations we might want to have, that whole era of agribusiness in organics.

Rabkin: Absolutely.

Cantisano: In 1980 there were the Lundbergs and the Pavichs. That was it. They were the only two big organic farms. Everybody else was small and home-scale, and small, diversified. So it just was really cool to go and hang out with people that were of like mind. And the Pavichs and Lundbergs, despite the scale of their operations, were also very like-minded and great to be with. I remember going to those meetings and I couldn't sleep all night. I was so wired up on all the juice from all these folks. Now, it's not like that so much because I can deal with it. But I can remember the level of intensity.

The other thing that happened in the early years quite a lot and I don't see so much anymore, and maybe it's just not obvious, is the amount of romances that started at Eco-Farm. We know of many pregnancies, marriages, and long-term relationships that all started at Eco-Farm, a lot of them, especially those first five, six, seven years. Again, I think it was because people were outcasts, and they didn't know anybody else, and we weren't getting validated in society, and they were kind of lonely. And then, oh, gee, you meet somebody that you really like, and then the next thing you know you're in love with. That's pretty neat. I can think of some really long-term amazing relationships that you can trace right back to that spot. We used to say there's a lot of pheromones in the air. And there really was. It was this social soup that people really thrived in. I think that to this

day that's the best part of Eco-Farm, that social part. I go to these other meetings and regular trade shows, or I go to the Farm Bureau meeting. Everybody is just grumpy and it's not any fun.

Rabkin: (laughter)

Cantisano: "Life sucks. Agriculture sucks."

Rabkin: (laughs)

Cantisano: (laughs) They do. They've got this: "Grrrr—" In the organic business everybody's like on an up. Yes, sure, you have down moments. But generally speaking, people have been doing well. They're now getting street credibility. The world thinks what we're doing is cool. That can't help but be good. That's a good thing. I'm absolutely sure that farmers' markets thrived almost exclusively, or at least to a great degree, because of the feedback farmers got from human beings. Because now you actually had an interaction with somebody who was there because *you* were there. No longer were you faceless, sticking it in a box, shipping it down the road. Oh, you had somebody to have a conversation with, and by the way, they thought you were cool. I can remember it. People would just say, "You have the best stuff. It's so great. Gosh, I'm so glad to get to know you!" And you just feel like, "Well, gee. That makes it all worthwhile."

So that social aspect is really important, and I wish there was more of it. I wish we had more of these kinds of events. That's why we started Heartland and the Hoes Down.[23] Those were all efforts to have more social events on the farm scale

of things. But there should be events like that all over the country, constantly. Because people need to get to know each other more: farmers, gardeners, retailers, consumers. Eco-Farm—I love that part of it.

The other part that's really cool is all this growth in the youth movement. It was really noticeable this year. Again, for a long time, most people who were coming were my age. And very few younger people until, I'd say, the last five, six years, it started to be that we were seeing more young folks. And then this last two years—last year we noticed it and this year even more. And I'm noticing it from the apprentices. I'm noticing, all of a sudden it's hip to be getting into agriculture. It's like, oh! Even though I tell them there's no money in it. You're going to do this just because you love it. But it's now hip to be a farmer.

Interestingly, women are becoming very enamored with farming. When we first got into this whole thing I couldn't find a woman farming. Now, women want to farm. The most amount of apprentice applications I get are from women. I got other farmers saying they can't even find any men to come farm. It's all women now. That's a pretty interesting social change.

Rabkin: Yes. Where do you think that comes from, both the youth influx and the greater preponderance of women?

Cantisano: Well, I think the youth influx comes from the fact that society is gradually drifting into a more natural lifestyle and awareness. It's become politically and socially acceptable to have a more natural lifestyle.

Rabkin: Some of these kids may have grown up going to farmers' markets?

Cantisano: Yes, or eating some of that stuff that Mom and Dad brought home from the health food store, or at a farmers' market. There's some interaction. And then there has been things written, not so much in movies and such, although I still think that's an area that's underexploited; I think that that whole area is one other place to get the next generation. But there have been enough things written now that have said positive things about the organic world and natural and farming that it's now cool. And then there's the fact that UCSC has had that Farm and Garden program, which we need to talk about at some point, because I know some stuff about that.[24] But that being there for a long time, or the Evergreen State College program having been going for a long time. So now you have kids that have gone through college programs and gotten the organic experience. Or the Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo program. They've gone through some of these programs and have come out the other side saying, "Gee. I actually want to do this." I hear from a lot of these kids that they heard about it when they were in a sociology class in college. They talk about Earth Day, or they talk about something environmental, and then it gets into a conversation about organics and they're like, "Whoa, well that sounds pretty cool." And then there's probably something about the fact that it skips generations. Trends tend to do that. So their grandparents may have been farmers. Maybe they had a grandparent or a great-grandparent who was in agriculture, and maybe that looks kind of intriguing from afar.

And then I believe in reincarnation. I believe that these things do come in trends, and people come along with past life experiences with growing things. I know this is true because I have had apprentices on the farm without a moment of previous growing experience and they have the natural green-thumb awareness that had to come from previous life's experience. So there's an evolutionary process, and out comes another group that maybe have a farming background in their blood. You know, not going back very far, we can all trace back someone in the family that's a farmer. And it's a lot of mystique. It's not always a reality. When you get out and do it, it's not nearly as glorious as it seems from afar. That's probably true with most jobs, I guess. But I think that mystique has now gotten to the point where people think, yes, I really want to do this.

And as far as the women part, I'm not a hundred percent sure what that's all about. I think it needs to be studied. I think there's an interesting sociological thing going on now. Something's really changed. Because when we first got into farming, women that were in farming were basically wives who helped the farmer out by being in a support position. But to be actually a farmer, or to be a farm worker, is a really new sociological phenomenon, from what I can see, and I don't know why that came out. I think someone should study that. I think it's really happening now. I think it's a cool thing because it is really happening.

I'll just give you another example of that. I've organized that bus tour at Eco-Farm for more than nineteen years, a long time now. I could never find any women to go visit.

Rabkin: What about the Janet Brians, the Betty van Dykes?[25]

Cantisano: Janet Brians and Betty Van Dyke! Yeah, they were the important exception to the rule.

Rabkin: (laughs) That's it.

Cantisano: (laughs) We did visit them, something like more than fifteen years ago. And after that it was like, where are the women? Then the last three years, there they are. They're here. In fact, two years ago I had two women on the tour.

Rabkin: You had Freewheelin' Farm.[26]

Cantisano: I had Freewheelin' [Amy Courtney] and Jasmine Roohani and her partner. They rent the Everett's Farm place [Everett Family Farm in Soquel, CA]. That was like the first time ever I had two women. I was like, all right, two women on the farm tour! And the same thing happened at finding women speakers for the conference. We used to get tons of criticism and we still get it (because it's hard to find women to speak at the conference), about being too male-centered. And then we'd say, "Okay. Tell us who you want to hear." And they'd say: "Well, we just want to hear more women." And we're like, "Tell us who you want to hear. We need some examples." And we would go back to the same people a lot because there were so few.

So I don't know why it's changed. I think it's a cool thing. I think it's really cool. I'm really admiring these— I mean, geez, Amy! My God, she's a role model. And I just had, on the latest Eco-Farm evaluation forms we were reading last week

two different people said, "You gotta have Amy get up and talk about" (she's been a speaker before, but)—

Rabkin: This is Amy Courtney of Freewheelin' Farm?

Cantisano: Yes. "She's our hero. We want her!" Golly. This is different, to have women become somewhat all of sudden to be heroized in agriculture. So I don't know the answer is as to why that is, but I think its way cool. I think it's partly that women are the ultimate nurturers. I mean, that goes way back. Definitely there's an interest in feminism and connection to earth. That's definitely big and up. And spirituality related to earth. But there's something else there. It's gotta take a pretty significant step to go from being interested in nature, to: "I'm going to be a farmer."

Rabkin: Yes.

Cantisano: That's a pretty big jump. I don't know why that is. But someone should study it. And by the way, did you see the movie that came out? It's called *Ladies of the Land*? It's a great movie. And it has Lyn Garling[27] in it, who used to be at the UCSC Farm and Garden. She's great. It's four East Coast women, and it is a great video.

Rabkin: It's a documentary?

Cantisano: Yes, and it follows four women in their start-ups on their farm. It's great. I showed it at our film festival. Our local environmental organization has an annual film festival, the SYRCL [South Yuba River Citizens League] Wild and

Scenic Environmental Film Festival. Now, there's another interesting trend. We've been doing that film festival for seven or eight years. We never got any ag submissions the first three years. None! And it was an environmental film festival, right? Then we got *The Future of Food* three years ago.[28] This year we got sixteen ag movies submitted. Sixteen of them. We only took twelve. And I was like, what is going on now all of a sudden? It was the same deal. Now people are interested in agriculture that are filmmakers. And most of them were about organics. And that *Ladies of the Land* was great. It was my favorite one that I showed. It was just like: This is cool. Women are in ag! And they all had really good stories. One used to work for Target at their corporate office and she's off running a farm and Lyn was the apprenticeship coordinator at UCSC. They all had good reasons to start up. It was a really inspiring movie, and it was practical and it was funny. Lyn was hilarious. She's has a very good wit and she did a great job.

More on Family History

Rabkin: This is Wednesday, April 9th, 2008. And this is Sarah Rabkin, and I'm here with Amigo Bob Cantisano, and we are picking up where we left off last time. Actually, the first thing I want to do is go back to something you said pretty early on, on Monday, when you were talking about your family background. You made a quick reference, which we didn't later pick up, but you were talking about how by the time you were born nobody in the family spoke Spanish; a lot of the connection to the roots was a little bit lost.

Cantisano: Yes.

Rabkin: But you said you were thankful for a great-aunt.

Cantisano: Yes.

Rabkin: Was there someone in your family who did some genealogy?

Cantisano: Yes, when I was about twenty-five or something, she collected up a bunch of genealogy, and actually put a little booklet together and traced the family history back. It had all the different parts of our family, not just the Moragas. Yes, then it was like: "Oh, wow." There were these vague references when I was growing up, but nobody ever said, "You know, your family is, like, the pioneers of California." I don't know why. It was almost like they were, I don't know, embarrassed or what— I think they just wanted to be Californians. I don't think your historical identity was as important in the fifties, for my grandparents and such. I think it was more important to fit in with your culture.

But, yes, thank God. Her name was Lena. She actually went and did the research. And then I went, oh, man, I should go check this out. And that got me started going to libraries and stuff. But by that time my grandmother and grandfather had both died, so I didn't have a chance to ask them much about it. So it was mostly second- and third-hand information. Interestingly, my dad doesn't know hardly anything about it. It's just, they didn't talk about it. It just wasn't part of the deal.

Rabkin: Do you still have the written stuff that your great-aunt put together?

Cantisano: Yes, I keep what I think are important things in life. I try to keep those. It was a simple little thing, but it got me inspired to see what my family was all about.

Rabkin: Okay, good. And now, picking up another thread from Monday: When we finished up, we were talking about Eco-Farm. I don't know whether you said everything you'd like to say about Eco-Farm. I'm certainly curious about your reflections on that conference annually, as an influence, a catalyst, and a reflection of changes going on in organic farming in California.

Cantisano: Yes. Well, I did actually remember what the name of that first conference was. It was called *To Husband the Earth: A Gathering of Farmers and Gardeners.* I think we called it that the second year, too, but I just can't remember what happened in year two. In my boxes of stuff, I have the poster, so I will eventually fish that all out.

But as far as Eco-Farm, gee, it seems like it's had a huge impact. When we started, organic was tiny. It had no credibility. We had a very hard time attracting people from the business community, other than maybe processors. We had a hard time attracting university types. And we didn't get very many, what we call, traditional farmers. It was mostly the alternative types who would come to the conference, with exceptions. But it was clearly more leaning towards the back-to-the-land types and the new farmers.

That's changed a lot. Now organic has become mainstream. Researchers actually use the word "organic" in their research reports, which wasn't happening at all

in 1980, or almost not at all. And we see a lot of conventional-type farmers show up for the conference. I know that it's had a ripple effect for a bunch of other conferences, because people come and say, "Oh, yes, well, this conference in such-and-such area started a few years later, and gee, they really seem like they're trying to model after what the Eco-Farm conference is about." I've heard that from a lot of different places. Or people come from other areas of the country and say, "Oh, I'm going to take back these ideas to our conference," so I know that that social aspect and things like having the Steward of Sustainable Ag Award is a big deal. Recognizing, lionizing, heroizing people is a big deal.

The whole business aspect and the educational aspect—it's grown. And the food aspect. A lot of food at conferences used to be lousy. Now conferences are going out of their way to make better and better food. Focusing on local and organic is a bigger issue. So yes, I think that Eco-Farm, without necessarily setting the agenda to create that change, has created change, and facilitated it.

We've also had workshops on topics that no one would touch, that would be just the untouchable conversation. Like, one we had just a few years ago was: Can genetic engineering and organics marry? Where do they fit? Nobody else will talk about that. Or, we had Cesar Chavez in '82, and it was really interesting and controversial. That whole topic of labor merging with organics—the conversation wasn't happening. And lots of other issues that were too hot for others to handle, we have gone out of our way to facilitate the discussion about at Eco-Farm.

We would go into areas, and work on things, and discuss things, and invite controversial speakers. We had a whole series of workshops, which we still have, which we call the "fringe." It's the stuff that's too weird to fit into science. It could be a psychic plant healer or a shaman. We've had them all. This is another part. You're never going to see that at a regular ag conference.

Or, doing this beginning-farmers tracks, which we've really been working on hard lately, the last maybe seven years, because we see this emergence of a bunch of young people new to farming. Or recognizing these different interest groups, like having a workshop specifically for young people, or having a workshop featuring old-timers, or women. I think I said this the other day. Women were scarce when we first got into agriculture. They were farm wives, but they weren't really farmers. We've gone out of our way to bring women up into the forefront of the conversation and make sure that they're as well represented as we possibly can. I think that has a spin-over effect.

We talked about a lot of things. Trying to bridge together that conversation of plant nutrition and insect and disease resistance. Well, nobody wanted to touch that in the university community because it crosses too many different disciplines. We embraced that. It's okay to cross over to as many disciplines as possible. And now that's actually a hot topic, and researchers are working on the subject.

I do think Eco-Farm has had a lot of catalyst effect. Its growth reflects the growth of the business. The industry has grown dramatically, and it's going to continue

to grow. The snowball is now rolling. We have pushed it over the hill, and it's rolling and gaining mass and momentum. And yet we're still trying to stay true to our roots. We actually refuse certain corporate sponsors, because we feel like maybe that's going to dilute the impact and objectivity of the conference. And we accept other ones whom we feel meet more our mission objectives more closely. We have a discussion about that every year, about whom we're going to take on that we're going to be in bed with. We're trying to maintain our folksy roots, and the humanistic part of it, while still recognizing the political, social aspects. I mean, we used to invite politicians, and *no one* would come. They just didn't want to touch this. Now politicians accept our invitations.

So that's all reflective of the fact that this is now a real deal. It's business. We had a whole thing where we invited banks to come talk. For years, we kept trying to get banks: "Come on, banks, tell us about what are your feelings about the goods and bads of loaning to organic farmers?" Finally got somebody to show up one time. And in the last few years, we've had workshops on this whole thing about funding mechanisms that are coming from traditional and nontraditional sources for ag lending.[29]

So, yes, I think Eco-Farm's had a huge impact without necessarily intending to do so. We don't sit down and say: Let's have a huge impact. We don't ever have a meeting that says: Gosh we need to make a bigger impact. It's always: How do we be more inclusive? Who are the audiences that we aren't reaching?

Another area we're proud of is we spent a lot of time and money sponsoring Hispanic farm workers and targeting them for many years with education they can put to use in their jobs. This effort is now starting to creep into more and more workshop formats in other events. We spend a lot of money hiring translators and providing scholarships. Those are important. So again, without necessarily intentionally doing it, we do set a trend.

Rabkin: How many of the ideas for subsequent years' topics come from participant suggestions from a previous conference?

Cantisano: That's a good question. I don't know that I could quantify it. I'll just say that we take every suggestion, and we put it into our hopper, and then we sort through them. We have an average of about two hundred workshop suggestions for the sixty that we select, but we keep all the ones we don't select, and we keep them in the rotation for the next three to four years. I would guess that probably one in ten easily comes from workshop participants. It might be more than that. We'd have to go back and really check that. And lots of plenary speakers have come from suggestions, and farmers as speakers also come from suggestions. Not always topics, but oftentimes speaker suggestions. It's a lot easier to find a topic than it is to find a good speaker on the subject. You can brainstorm a great idea and then go, "Well, now, who the heck's going to talk on this?" So we oftentimes get really good suggestions from participants about potential speakers, someone who's doing something they think is really cool. And then that might spin into a topic. It might be somebody who's a goat farmer, and then it was, like, "Oh, gee, we ought to have a session on goats. Well, here's

one person we could have on goats." And then we might get one or two others to complement that person.

So we take a lot of suggestions. We're very open to both the positive and the negative criticism we get about that conference. We just had our breakdown. We break down all the things, and go through all the topics, and review the last conference, and look at all the suggestions. And there're a lot of really good ones in there again this year. I'm sure some of them will get selected.

Yes, we're very open to the democratic process. And our committee is wide open. We take new members all the time. We're really open to getting people involved, which is also a little bit different than other conferences, I've noticed. Because I've been on steering committees for other conferences, and they get really picky about who gets to have any say at the meetings. We're just the opposite. "You got something you want to say? C'mon and be part of this." We really want to encourage whatever demographic we can and feedback we can. I'm not going to pick at the university, but the university conferences tend to be very selective at who they let on their selection committees and who they let talk.

Well, that's another area where we broke the rules. When I first started, you couldn't hold a conference unless it was all experts speaking. You didn't put farmers on a panel and have them talk. You didn't have people from the industry that were salespeople or researchers come and talk. You had university people, or researchers, or government people, or somebody. It was unheard of to actually have the practitioners up there acting as experts. That's now common. Lots of

workshops have that, or conferences have that now. But twenty-eight years ago, that wasn't happening at all. It was all experts with their blue slides. We used to just laugh and say, "Oh, it's all experts." But all these practitioners who had the practical knowledge didn't get invited. And they had the real wisdom that farmers need to hear from.

The Central Coast Farmers

Rabkin: Let's move to the Central Coast for now. I'm curious about what your perspective is on the Central Coast as a particularly influential region in the development of organic agriculture.

Cantisano: Oh, yes a very big influence. Starting from the UCSC Farm and Garden program, which clearly is an incubator for lots of people that are out doing it, and then the many organic farmers in the area. From the very beginning, there was a fairly high concentration of organic farmers in the area, most of them small-scale, diversified, family-type farms.

Rabkin: Can you talk about some of *your* recollections of some of those particular farmers? Russel Wolter, Jerry Thomas, Betty Van Dyke, Janet Brians, whoever—

Betty Van Dyke

Cantisano: Sure, I can talk about any or all of those. Well, let's talk about Betty for a minute.[30] Betty was really unique because: there's a woman farmer. She was

in charge of her farm. Her three sons were involved, but at that time, when I met Betty (it must have been the mid-seventies) I don't think I knew any other women farmers in charge of their farm. So that was unique. Betty was always really warm and receptive to me and to other people who came out. She was very receptive to the hippies that would come and pick the fruit. And she would actually let people pick fruit. That, in and of itself, is unique, because typically farmers are protective of their orchards and they want basically to hire crews to come in. Betty was really good about that, and she had been farming for many decades before there was a term "organic." A lot of these early people who are now called organic farmers—they didn't have that term in their lexicon until somebody came and said, "Oh, that's *organic*." And then Betty realized that she was an organic farmer. But she and her dad, they just never used chemicals, or at least to the best of my knowledge they never did.

She was a fantastic farmer in a great location. If you want to grow cherries and apricots, there aren't too many places on the planet that have the climatic and soil conditions right there where her ranch is. That whole lower Santa Clara Valley is unreal. It's just perfect. The fact that it gets hot days and cool nights causes fruit to ripen slowly and fully, so you get really deep flavors. And then she had a lot of older trees at the time we first met her. And those trees, of course, the older they get, the more flavorful things get.

So Betty was really fortuitous in being in the right spot, and also being someone who is perceptive enough to recognize that there was a market for a crop that wasn't sprayed and didn't have chemicals on it. And she was really interested in

seeing her sons stay involved in agriculture. Two of the three are, and the third one is indirectly involved in ag. So that's unusual, just to actually see a generation pass into this modern era and see the kids still being involved in ag. Peter, her oldest, runs the farm, and her middle son, Curt, has a farm in Costa Rica and comes back from Costa Rica during harvest and other times in the season to work this farm. And the youngest son, Eric, works in the trucking business, trucks produce and stuff. So they all stayed in the ag thing.

And Betty, she's really proud. She's a really proud person, proud of her heritage and proud to be a hard-working farmer. She's got a quick smile. I always liked Betty. She's really a wonderful, easy-to-get-along-with human being. And she was thrilled that people wanted to buy her fruit and were willing to pay a premium for it, although she never was really able to sell the apricots initially as organic, because there just wasn't enough market. She had too much fruit for that market, so she would sell what she could as organic; the rest of it went to the cannery or to the dry yard.

Rabkin: Even though she was growing it organically.

Cantisano: Yes. This was kind of a common phenomenon back then. There was a lot of stuff that would be grown legally, organically that wasn't necessarily being marketed that way because people hadn't developed markets. Especially with perishable things like fruit, you really have to have a pretty good infrastructure to sell much.

So Betty was unique because she was the only woman farmer I really knew at that time farming on any kind of scale.

Rabkin: I'm curious about that phenomenon of some farmers, farm families who managed somehow to skirt the push for agrochemicals in the fifties. Because as I understand it, those were being pushed pretty hard on most farmers.

Cantisano: Yes, it seems like it.

Rabkin: So to see somebody who managed to become organic *de facto* because her parents or grandparents never went the chemical direction—how do you see that happening? Is it a rare phenomenon?

Cantisano: Yes, I'd say it's really rare. I'd say you could count a handful of people who didn't actually buy the agro-industrial model, because it was brought to you by every direction. It was brought to you from magazines, brought to you by your neighbors, brought to you by the farm ag supply sales guys, brought to you by the farm adviser. Everybody that you met in your circle was using, or about to, or just had the latest, greatest modern agrochemical.

I think there are people rooted in some of that Old World tradition. That's part of it. Also, it tended to be people, at least from what I can see, that were very frugal with their money and they didn't want to spend money on things unwisely, and they felt that chemicals were maybe extraneous or expensive to put into their already existing, "successful system." I mean, it's that whole thing of, if you're

not succeeding, then you're tempted to try something else. But if you're succeeding, then maybe that temptation is reduced.

Rabkin: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Cantisano: Yes, I think there's some of that. I think Betty is again, a good example of being in the right place: perfect soil, perfect climate. Gilroy is famous for growing cherries. They got a market right away, apricots. They could sell them because the Santa Clara Valley was famous. So they had the right crop at the right time, so there wasn't the pressure, because she could market her stuff and make a living at it.

And because there're so few places you can grow apricots and cherries, it wasn't like the world was competing with her all the time. That's changed some, because now they're being grown in Oregon and Washington, but those are later districts, so even still, they're sort of their little unique niches. So I think in the case of Betty, anyway, that they were able to make a living without needing the pressure of the chemicals. And she believed strongly what her father said, that it just wasn't necessary, and they were able to succeed without them.

Russel Wolter

Russel [Wolter] is another example.[31] They never used them. Russel grew up on a farm that never owned a sprayer. They just didn't own one. I've known Russel since about the mid-seventies. And at one point in time, somebody from San Jose State came out to his farm, an entomology class. This was the late seventies. And

they came and did a study about the pests and predators on Russel's farm. There was a farm right next door, which is now where Earthbound's farm stand is, was farmed by Asians, Chinese, I think, but it might have been Japanese. I've forgotten. They were farming chemically, and Russel was farming organically, and literally the only difference was a roadway, a dirt road between them. And the class was trying to figure out why Russel was able to succeed over here and these guys over here were using all these chemicals. They spent quite a long time out there, studying this.

Russel was the one that told me this story. He just goes, "You know, it all came down to the fact that I had all these bugs"—which he knew none of the names of. He said, "I have all these bugs living on my farm that are eating my pests, and these guys over here don't have those bugs." And because they didn't have those bugs (because they had killed them through spraying), they got themselves on a treadmill.

Russel is an interesting example. He farmed before chemicals. His dad had farmed pre-World War II, and they just stayed with—we're going to get chicken manure or cow manure, and we're going to fight the weeds by hand, and if we get a bug infestation, we don't have a crop. And they never sprayed.

Russel tells a story about Mr. [Bud] Capurro. Russel's farming organically, and he's selling it to local restaurants and supermarkets, and nobody cares. The organic's not caught on yet. And then somebody says, "Organic? Oh, you're organic?" He was one of the people certified by Rodale when they came out with

that other program before CCOF [California Certified Organic Farmers]. I don't know how Russel learned of all this, but at any rate, he became certified. And, at some point in time Mr. Capurro, which is the produce shipper that he went through—he modernized Russel because they wanted the waxed cardboard boxes with a printed label. Before that, Russel was all in wire-bounds, a, typical funky farmer. Mr. Capurro was a large conventional produce shipper. This was his only organic line. But he took Russel on, and he was the cooler and shipper for Russel. This is the mid-seventies when he was shipping through Capurro.

Anyway, one day Russel had an aphid problem. I think it was in cauliflower or broccoli, and Russel tells the story much better than I do, but I just like it—this is a great story. Russel says that Mr. Capurro came out and said, "Well, you know, Russel, the rules—you can, like, maybe spray around the edges of the place and maybe clean it up, and then you could still pick it in the middle and it would be organic, you know?" So Russel didn't say anything, but I guess he heard him. He's really respectful of Bud Capurro.

Then the field cleaned up, as it does do. Pests cycle out. So then he started shipping cleaner and cleaner stuff, and then one day he hauls a load into the cooler there in Moss Landing, and Mr. Capurro comes out and says, "Well, Russel, they're all nice and clean. I'm glad to see that you took my advice and sprayed." And Russel said, "Well, Mr. Capurro, spray? I thought you said, "Pray."

Rabkin: [Laughs heartily.]

Cantisano: It was just classic Russel.

Rabkin: [Laughs.]

Cantisano: It was just, like, DING! I mean, that's Russel. He was a seat-of-the-pants dirt farmer. He didn't have any science behind him. The same with Betty. Now, Jerry Thomas is a little different, a different style. He came from a different era. He's younger. But Russel was really, you know— I mean, I'm the first person, I think, that did a soils test on his place just to check out what the fertility was. He just never had done that. I realized that he needed some lime. One of his big limitations was that his field was low in calcium. That's an indirect aphid control, as it turned out, and when we started liming his place, he had less aphid problems.

But working on this farm supply advising business, which was kind of an interesting hybrid, I was trying to educate people as well as provide them things. So Russel's like, "No, I don't think we've ever taken a soil test. Let's go see what's going on." And then he was, like, "Oh, wow. Gee." Most everything was really nice and fertile, but he was really low in calcium. And that turned out to have a big impact on that farm.

Russel's a very funny human being. He's always cracking jokes, and likes to laugh. He has this really high-pitched kind of a hyena kind of laugh. I just love to go visit him. He is just this really humble— I mean, Carmel Valley—we're talking up-, up-, up-, upscale, and Russel is, like, Mr. Dirt Farmer in the middle, and there's a golf course over here, and a subdivision over here, and they're

driving the Mercedes, and Russel is driving this beat-up '60s Chevy, you know? And it was, like, wow, this is interesting.

I think he was involved with his brother in the feed store up in front. So they'd have all this wealthy clientele coming in to go to the feed store to buy their sacks of stuff for their horses. And Russel would be out in the back with the produce. I always just thought it was really interesting—polar opposites. Russel's always this humble, sweet guy. He and Karen would invite me in for something to eat or a cup of coffee or something, and we'd sit around and talk.

Maybe this is why a lot of these people and I bonded, was that not very many people came and gave them very much interaction. It was more business-y kind of stuff. I was really interested in them as people. And, sure, there was a business relationship, too, but I really liked to get to know them. So I'd spend hours and hours and hours walking around with Russel, just looking at stuff and talking and laughing. He'd always cut jokes. He has a zillion jokes. He's a very funny guy.

And then in '89, we had Alar Sunday. You know about that?

Rabkin: There was a particular day when—

Cantisano: Well, the Natural Resources Defense Council had released this study on the effect of Alar in apples and apple juice and health impacts on kids. And they had gotten some publicity on it, but it had really not taken off. But in the space of ten days or so, Meryl Streep was on the *Mike Douglas Show* talking about

it. She was their spokesperson at the moment. And when it really hit, was when she was on *60 Minutes* on Sunday. Things just changed overnight. Alar Sunday, as we ended up calling it, because it was, like, boom! All of a sudden, what was a growing industry, and it had been growing along, all of a sudden was hot news. We were the front page of *Time* magazine. The front page. I mean, the cover!

Rabkin: Organic agriculture?

Cantisano: Yes! Organic farming. This is a major shift that impacted everybody we knew a whole bunch. And Russel, some place in the eighties, he had scaled up. He had always farmed his home ranch where he lives, and he leased this property that was right there at Highway 1 at the Carmel River. It's the Odello Ranch, which used to be an artichoke field. He took over the east side of it, where now another friend of mine farms, Jamie Collins. Russel scaled up. He was the first pretty large-scale organic vegetable farmer. He knew the market was growing. It was growing faster than his forty acres could keep up with.

And so he leased—I'm going to say that was seventy-five or eighty acres of land. I sold a whole bunch of stuff to him during that period of scaling up, because he was starting to grow a bunch of transplants to increase the production of both his home farm and the leased property. I sold him a bunch of stuff for transplanting, so I ended up spending a lot of time with him during that period of time.

Rabkin: This is when you were still running Peaceful Valley.

Cantisano: Running Peaceful Valley, yes. This is the mid-eighties. So he scaled up, and he built this homemade transplanter out of a truck. Russel is the classic budget kind of guy. He does everything, always, on a budget. Just doesn't have any money, so he always does it just as minimalistic as he could. So he had taken this old flatbed fifties delivery truck or something, and stripped off the beds. He built this framework, and he put these mattresses down so the farm workers could lay on the mattresses as the truck drove down the beds and drop these plants in these holes that he was making up front with this little machine he made that punctured little holes in the bed. Anyway, that truck is still sitting there on the ranch, but it doesn't look like what it used to look like. I saw it there the other day, and it made me think of the eighties.

So Russel gets scaled up, and now he's really moving a lot of produce. And then Alar Sunday hits, and you couldn't sell it fast enough. And at one point he was laughing. His label was Down to Earth brand. One day he says, "Amigo Bob. Our lettuce is getting smaller and smaller, because we just can't pick it fast enough there is so much demand, and so we're cutting it smaller and smaller to keep up with the orders." And then he goes, "I actually was just thinking about changing my label to Down to Dirt."

Rabkin: [Laughs.]

Cantisano: It had gotten down to dirt. The organic industry was super hot all of a sudden. That was just how it happened. I mean, I remember my friends at Full Belly.[32] They were growing potatoes, and they were selling for five bucks for fifty

pounds, so that was ten cents a pound. And they went to fifty bucks in the space of about a month, six weeks. It just went zooooot! All of a sudden, everybody was interested in organic. And it was a short-term phenomenon, but it was maybe six months of just incredible pressure. Everybody wanted to buy organic produce all of a sudden: restaurants, supermarkets.

And there was already this existing natural foods industry, which grew as a spurt of the Alar thing, too. So the pressure was on people like Russel, and they just couldn't meet the demand. But that sparked the next generation of new organic farmers. Because you got the first-generation organic people and then the second generation. You can actually really trace it to right then, right there to the late eighties, early nineties. That's when the more traditional conventional farmer saw a market opportunity and jumped into the organic business. There were a lot of those people in the Central Coast.

Rabkin: I recently interviewed Jim Rider, who was one of those people.[33]

Cantisano: Jim would be right there. A perfect example of it. Alar Sunday made Jim become an organic apple farmer.[34] Even though Bill Denevan had been doing it for many years before, there was only so much market. And the Momiis. The Momiis were the original Watsonville organic growers. I haven't seen their names in a long time. Boy, I don't even know why I thought of them. They were a Japanese-American family. They were organic before the Riders.

The Riders were farming conventionally, but Jim will gladly say, honestly, that Alar Sunday pushed them into that deal. But Russel was there before that. Or

Jerry Thomas was there before. These were people that were already involved in it for reasons other than the organic business aspects of it. They were in it because that was the way they did things: natural and organic, no matter what the market was interested in. Russel was a pioneer. I just love the guy. We get together and we hug each other. He's a very different human being than I, but we have this really strong common bond. I don't know what it is about Russel and I. And Karen too. Very wonderful people. I love to see them, and I never can get them to go to anything public. They're kind of public-shy. I had to ask about five or six times to get them to come to Eco-Farm and talk.[35] I said, "You can come, and just come for lunch. It'll be okay." He hasn't talked in public very often, but he was really good. He did fine with it.

Jerry Thomas

Everybody else who was around, like Jerry Thomas, were more of these diversified, smaller operations. Jerry, I would call more a hippie back-to-the-land type, sort of the transitional between the Russels and the Bettys, and the next commercial wave. He is more like me in that regard. That's what I think of him as, a back-to-the-land, diversified, small-scale farmer. When I first met him, he was more focused on flowers than he was on the other things. That was his niche. Part of that was coming from conventional farming. He had farmed some of those conventionally, apparently, and then had made the organic transition. I don't really know the story of that. But I know that he wasn't always doing organic flowers.

He was always one of those people I thought was really a smart guy. I always thought he had a lot of both street smarts and intellect. There's a lot of farmers that you'd think of having really got a lot of street smarts, but not always are you thinking of them as "this is a real thinker type." I always thought of Jerry as a real thinker. He has one of those real active minds.

He was always the one that seemed like he kept diversifying a little bit faster than anybody else. That's what I remember. Flowers got him started in this thing, and then he was doing fruit; then he was doing some vegetables; then he was doing some more vegetables and more flowers. He just kept expanding. I don't remember many other people doing that. Russel had his set of crops, and Betty had her set of crops, and they stayed in those crops pretty much, with a little bit of variation, but pretty much they stayed the same.

Rabkin: Was Jerry interested just in challenging himself, or was he keeping an eye on the market?

Cantisano: I think it's the market savvy, a lot of it. He did a lot of farmers' markets, and I think that had something to do with it. And then he also sold to all the natural food stores, and they were probably keeping him clued into where the market was going. He seemed like he was—and I still think he is—market savvy. To succeed as much as he has on as a small scale as he's operated in, that's pretty unique. There aren't a whole lot of people farming that small of acreage that have made a living at it. Jerry's unique. Most of them either had an outside income from something else—which maybe Jerry did, too, I don't know; I don't

think so, though—or they got bigger. They expanded someplace down the road. That's kind of a trend.

Nick Pasqual

Did we ever talk about Nick, Nick Pasqual? Nick—now, there was a character. He's still alive.[36]

Rabkin: I hear he still shows up at the Aptos farmers' market sometimes.

Cantisano: Oh, he does? Yes, Nick was in that same era as Russel. He farmed organically before they called it organic. I think that was part of who he was. I met him probably in the late seventies, early eighties. He has lots of stuff to say. He's got a lot on his mind, and he likes to talk.

Nick was also very diversified, and he was famous for carrots. Before the mega-carrot thing came in, he had a pretty strong niche for carrots because his were organic, and they were really good quality. And he was competing with these other guys who claimed to be organic but were cheating. This is kind of interesting; I looked up some of that since you were here the other night. There was a farmer who was from Stockton. He turned out he was cheating. He was selling everything as organic. He was on the farmers' market. But he got busted swapping out bags, the same carrots, some organic, some conventional. It was hilarious. It was a bad story.

But anyway, so Nick would be competing with him in stores. Economically he couldn't compete with him because [the other farmer] was cheaper, and organic

carrot farming *is* more expensive, because of the weed control, than conventional carrot farming.

But anyway, Nick was a real interesting guy because he was really focused on small scale. He was really good at farmers' markets. He was just this old guy that was talkative and sweet, and everybody liked him, and he had a real strong following always at the markets. And his carrots were outrageous. He grew a lot of other things, too, but that's always the thing that stuck in my mind. Our co-op used to buy his carrots preferentially. We would work out with that group that was coming to Santa Cruz to make sure that we got Nick's carrots hauled up to us, and they were always a really big hit.

Rabkin: How do you explain this concentration of pioneering organic farmers in the Central Coast area?

Cantisano: That's a good question. I think part of it is because there are a lot of farms in the Central Coast. So right off the bat you have lots of crops for a long time. It's a perfect climate and a lot of good soils, so there's lot of things that can be grown, depending on your distance from the ocean. And that's close enough to market that people can actually get a reasonably good return, as opposed to if you're in the San Joaquin Valley. And there's also a longer history of smaller farms than there is in the rest of the state, typically, maybe because land values were high. I'm not really sure. But, you see, now in Salinas you can't find any pioneering organic farmers, because that all got dominated by bigger farms. So where you find them is in the less desirable valleys, whether it's the Pajaro

[Valley] or the Santa Cruz area, the coast. That tended to be where smaller farms succeeded and didn't get driven out, or dominated by big ag.

Rabkin: Why is the Salinas Valley preferable?

Cantisano: Better soil. It's got the best soil around and, for many crops, the best climate. And for whatever reason, it was the first place to get the reputation. So once it had a reputation, it was shipping stuff all over the country on rail cars, and trucks. It's better soil. Where they first started farming in Salinas, it's the best soil around. The Castroville area and Salinas is the best.

So I think probably the Central Coast has more of the pioneers because there were lots of small farms that these people could buy or rent. Like Bill Denevan. He's a hippie who rented a friend's apple orchard and pear orchard, and got in the business through doing that. It was pretty much a derelict orchard that someone had planted and then pretty much let go. So then there was an opportunity for Bill to jump into it. I think that happens with some people like that.

And, also, it's just the fact that the Central Coast has a hip community that is looking for these crops. The markets drive a lot of people's actions. I know when Betty recognized that these hippies from Santa Cruz wanted to buy her stuff, was, like, "Oh, great." Because in Gilroy there wasn't anybody looking to buy organic crops in 1975. But in Santa Cruz there was, or in San Francisco. So you kind of migrate to your market and got more of them involved.

The rest of it, I think, is just the luck of the draw. Why were there more in the Central Coast than other places? I think there is definitely some effect from the UCSC Farm and Garden being there since the sixties. That has given some credibility to it, and also spun off some people into organic farming. Like Camp Joy. Jim Nelson.[37] You can trace the whole lineage of that small-scale, intensive farming stuff right back to Camp Joy. And before Camp Joy, that goes back to the Farm and Garden, to Alan Chadwick. And Santa Cruz is a liberal town, and that has a positive effect. The number of college-educated consumers with a good income helped push the movement. But we used to laugh. It's still that way, to a great degree. You go to Salinas, you can't find health foods. There's no natural food stores. There's no healthy restaurants. I mean, what is that, thirty miles away, forty miles away? You go to Gilroy, there's nothing. It's all concentrated right there around Santa Cruz and a little bit in Monterey. So it attracts a certain audience of people, and then the farmers have responded to that. I guess that's the main issue, yes.

The UCSC Farm and Garden

Rabkin: And how about the influence of the UCSC Farm and Garden program, later named CASFS? What association did you have with that program, or how have you seen it influence the area?

Cantisano: I was a guest teacher for a number of years, so I got to meet a lot of students there. And, there's the faculty and staff whom I've known for a long time. Well, it has had a huge impact. The whole idea of doing on-farm research

on organic got started at UCSC. That was the first UC property that was doing that. And holding field days for farmers to come and learn from other organic growers such as Jim Cochran [Swanton Berry Farm].[38] We used to team up with UCSC. Eco-Farm, and before that, the Committee for Sustainable Agriculture and UCSC used to do joint field days. We put on one there on organic strawberry production. And we went to Cochran's. I think we toured someplace else, too. Then we had a workshop on organic production with an eye towards teaching conventional growers how to make the transition. The UCSC Farm and Garden have had an influence on the conventional farming community. And then the fact that it's focused on, I'll call it a hybrid of the sixties communal/school, education combination. That's an important component. My son was an apprentice there when he was eighteen. And he said, "Dad, this is a lot like living at home." But for a lot of those other people, it wasn't. It was a very big, dramatic shift to go live in a tent, and live with forty other people, and cook meals together and stuff. And learn in the classroom and on the farm every day. That was a big deal for a lot of folks.

There are many, many hundreds of people out there that are working in agriculture or in horticulture that came directly out of that program, that went out and did something because they got the training wheels on, on how to do that. So that's darn unique.

And Chadwick, in his own way, had an amazing influence on people. I met him a few times. I didn't really know him, but I met him. He was one of those charismatic teachers, and he got people inspired. And, like I said, literally the

Camp Joy project came directly from UCSC. I know most of the original Camp Joy members really well. Jim's the sole remaining person from that era. But that whole thing of working and living together, and doing intensive gardening, and focusing on composting, and diversified production, and lots of flowers, you don't find that on hardly any farms. Those are really kind of unique. A little bit more of it now than there was twenty-five years ago, but still not much.

The Farm and Garden program inspired all that. You can look back and say, oh, yes, those are ideas that people either learned or were part of when they were at that school. So that's had a huge impact.

And then just to get that scientific credibility. Sure, UCSC still carries the hippie deal through the university system, and they don't give it the full credence that it should. Davis gets all the ag credence. (That's a joke.) But it's grown in stature over time. For many, not necessarily accurate reasons, it was pretty lowly respected when I was first dealing with the university, trying to get them involved in wanting to have something to do with sustainable agriculture.

Founding of UC Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program

Rabkin: When was that?

Cantisano: Oh, in the mid-eighties. A group of about twenty organic farmers went to the chancellors of the University and said, "The University of California needs to have researchers and students involved in organic research. We need to

have on-farm research, and it can't all just come from the ivory tower." We said, "UCSC has a little bit of the research that we need," and they were just kind of going, "Well, that's just that UCSC hippie deal." I mean, they didn't say it that way, but that's what you got out of it was, the only really credible science was going to come out of Davis or Riverside.

So we would say, "Well, okay, well then let's get somebody in Davis involved in this. You've got five thousand employees in agricultural research and you have nobody that's got an organic title. Nothing at all." We went to many, many meetings with the vice president of agriculture. And they would just give you all these platitudes. [claps hands] "Oh, this is so great. We're so glad we got your feedback. Thank you so much for showing up."

And they'd take all of our comments, and they'd wine and dine us, try to get us to go away. It was a real interesting deal. They figured, if we just kind of listen to these dirt farmers long enough, they'd just leave. And nobody left. We just kept coming back, and more and more.

Rabkin: Who is "we" in this case?

Cantisano: There was a whole group of people. Probably the most active was Paul Muller, who's now part of Full Belly Farm; Howard Beeman; myself; Bruce Jennings, who worked in Senator Nicholas Petris' office; Pete Price, who was a lobbyist for CAFF; Barney Bricmont; Will Allen, who is now farming in Vermont; Steve Pavich; Fred Smeds; Paul Kolling from Sebastopol; Kate Burroughs from Harmony Farm Supply; Carl Rosato from Oroville.

It tended to be more people from the Central Valley, because all the meetings were held in Davis. So we didn't get too much Central Coast participation. I'm sure there were some that showed up. I've forgotten now. We had a long list. I can actually drag that out from someplace. I have a bunch of those things. We had meeting after meeting, and my wife was going crazy. We thought we actually had the university interested at one point. And they were, sort of. They were doing a good job of "listening" to us, but they weren't really *doing* anything. So we got frustrated.

We had gotten to know Senator Nicholas Petris earlier, when in '79 we passed the first organic foods law in the United States, the California Organic Foods Act. I was on that group. Nicholas Petris and Jerry Brown were really the reasons we got it passed. Petris was in the Senate, and Jerry Brown was the governor. Without their support, I'm sure we would never have got the law passed, because there was hostility from the Department of Food and Agriculture. They downright did not want to do this.

Anyway, we got to know Petris, and years went by, and they had this new guy, Bruce Jennings, on staff. And at one point we said, "Bruce, we're just getting a lot of happy mouth from the university, but we're not seeing anything happening." So he went and talked to his boss. Well, karma and fate came to play. It turned out by this time, Senator Nicholas Petris was the chair of the Senate budget committee for the University of California. So the entire UC budget that went through the senate had to go through Nicholas Petris. He was a heavy-duty environmentalist senator from Oakland. He was a labor activist and associated

with Chavez and the UFW. And he was also a heavy anti-pesticide guy. He was really, really down on pesticides. He had actually passed some laws that made some regulations on pesticides, and he was already a thorn in the side of agriculture. He was an interesting guy. He acted on his beliefs. We went to these meetings, and we could see that we were not getting anywhere with the organic thing, just could not shove this down anybody's throats, no matter how honey-coated.

Oh, then other people showed up at the meetings. University professors Miguel Altieri and Steve Gliessman.[39] They were true supporters. But they were kind of marginalized, too. Because, this agroecology deal; that's just too weird, you know? We would sit with all these very traditional university professors and department heads and give our spiel: "The organic thing's taking off. We need to get research. And we've got some real problems. And there're some areas that we need some science." "Oh, yeah. Mm-hm, yeah. Mm-hm, yeah."

So at any rate, we get Petris interested, and he says, "Well, all right, so what do you need?" We said, "Well, we need somebody in the mainstream part of the University of California to actually lead up a division or a department that does research on organic farms." We went to all these meetings, and we realized that they weren't going to buy "organic," so we changed it to "sustainable." That "sustainable" word didn't have all the charge to it that "organic" had to it. So now we had a chance.

Right during this same time, I was also on the technical advisory board for a USDA program. The USDA was coming up with what they called LISA, the Low Input Sustainable Agriculture program. "Low input" turned out to be a misnomer, but that's what they named it, LISA. I was on the technical advisory board. We were reviewing grants. So there was grant money starting to come up. So now, of course, the university's ears perked up because now there's some money coming in the door that they could get if they got this "sustainable" thing going.

So we'd go to these meetings and they'd go, "Look, now they're starting to get some money." (And it was a trickle of money, but there was a little bit of fed money coming out, but it doesn't take much to lure the university, from what we found out.) So we went to Petris, and we said, "All right. We want to get some legislation passed that will establish a sustainable agriculture program at Davis." And after a number of meetings, we wrote this legislation that established what they ended up calling UC SAREP, the UC Sustainable Agriculture, Research and Education Program.

About five of us wrote that legislation. UC Vice President of Agriculture Kendrick said, "Well, we just don't have the budget. We just can't do this. We're only got five thousand people." And I forget how many millions of dollars the budget was, two hundred and eighty million or something. We said, "You've got tons of money." "Oh, no, everybody is fully assigned. You know, we're having a contraction of resources, and we're just—"

So we said, "All right, so what's the hook? We gotta get some money to lure the university into this program." So Petris helped us put a million dollars in the bill. Petris wrote the bill so that it would fund a chair with a million bucks. Well, ding! All of a sudden, we have the University of California's wholehearted support. Yay, now they're the sustainable champions. They just think, "Oh, yes. All right. Sustainable agriculture. Let's go for it!"

Well, what really got them most upset was that the University of California had never had a research grant program that had any public members on it. It was always in-house. It was always university professors or related types. And we said, "No, no. We want it to be half from the organic farming community. We want it to be farmers and people involved in industry. And we want the money to be spent on on-farm research." Well, they were really nervous about that. They're like, "What? On-farm research?" And multidisciplinary. That's where that word came up. It was, like, "Oh, my God, we're gonna cross over disciplines, and how are we going to do that?" We said, "But that's what farming is. It isn't just entomology. It's got all these components." "Well, we just don't have any way to do that," they said.

So we said, "All right, so let's have a sustainable ag program that's multidisciplinary, that funds projects that are multidisciplinary, and also have all the different players involved, so farmers have an opportunity to be involved in the research and design the research, as well as what they're looking for as an outcome. So it isn't just for some university guy to get a degree or get published." And it just drove the university crazy. It just drove them nuts. They

were going "no" right to the end. And Petris was going, "Well, okay. You're not getting the million bucks unless we get the committee evenly divided: twenty-four members: twelve public, twelve university." They just screamed and yelled.

And at one point, Petris said, "All right, I'm not going to pass out the University of California's entire budget until *you guys* get off the dime." I swear to God, then they got a bunch of heat. The ag and natural resources department got a bunch of heat from the rest of the University. So they went, "Okay, all right. Okay, we'll sign off on this deal."

So they did finally sign off and urge the passing of the legislation, and [laughs] then they proceeded to totally bastardize that deal as quickly as possible. That was the most frustrating process, because we had spent so many hours on it. All of us organic farmers that were selected for the review committee got kicked off within a year and a half because we just wouldn't put up with the bullshit that UC was trying to pull. Right off the bat they had problems. They would get these research proposals, RFPs, out after MUCH debate on the content and requirements of the RFP's. We wanted it to be multidisciplinary, on-farm, practical, no theoretical, solving real world problems using organic techniques. UC said, "You can't use the word "organic" but "sustainable" is okay." Only we could not agree on what the word "sustainable" meant, which is still a subject of debate today. We're trying all these different tactics, trying to figure out how to get it so they'll do the research as organic. And we said, "We want to get all the different stakeholders involved—the research community, and the farmer

community, and the public interest community—and get them all involved." So here comes the first round of proposals.

Rabkin: And when is this, now?

Cantisano: This is around the late-eighties, '88, I can't remember exactly. So here comes the first round of proposals, and they're all from UC research people. We could tell that all the authors of the proposals had done was change the title of the proposal and insert "sustainable" as needed within the body of the proposal. It was the classic chemical, reductionist research project disguised with the word sustainable liberally inserted, and then down here on page four they've added a few names, so they've got some multidisciplinary stakeholders in there. The organic farmers on the review committee declared, "This is bullshit!" We're rejecting this one, and this one, and eventually all of the proposals submitted were rejected by the farmers. And meanwhile there's this dialogue going on with all these University people, and they're saying, "Well, this is fine. This will be a great research project." And all the farmers are going, "Ehh! This isn't gonna be a research project that will give *us* anything useful."

It was all projects that would be good for somebody to write a paper [on] and get published, but what we were looking for was things to actually solve problems and come up with solutions. They were looking for all these minutia details.

So anyway, after a year and a half of it, they did two things: UC started changing the rules on who was on the committee. So they started inviting in conventional farmers, not just organic farmers. Then they would hand-select some big-scale

conventional farmers who were all into chemicals. So of course, they would lean more towards the chemically-oriented research.

And then they got these public-interest people who had nothing to do with agriculture. I can't remember now who they all were. They had the Native Plant Society and different people in there. They were all nice, but it ended up so that we were getting fewer and fewer organic farmers on the committee, the activist-farmer types. There was less and less of us, so we weren't getting any of our proposals approved. It was just a nonstop battle.

And then we had this gigantic battle. The university found some federal money. They got gifted a piece of property out west of Davis, a couple hundred acres, and they wanted to establish the long-term sustainable research project. And they put up this long-term research plot research proposal. Okay, so they give us the thing, and the research is confined to three systems: chemicals, low-input chemicals, and no chemicals. That was going to be the three trials. And we said, "Wait a minute, now. That doesn't match anything that we're talking about here." It was: chemicals, full blown; low chemicals; and nothing. And I said, "Okay. Now there's something else here you're missing."

Rabkin: [Laughs.]

Cantisano: We had to go to these meetings and argue and argue and argue. "Look, modern organic farming's got to be included in this research. Because if you're really going to do long-term research, you want to find out about what are the benefits." Well, thank God we argued for that, because now that's the

only part of that program that's cranking out any useful research. That's where they found all that important research— I don't know if you've seen this research about nutritional differences in organic and conventional tomatoes that Alison Mitchell, from Davis, just came out with.[40] It all came out of that long-term research project because we forced them to have organic farming in the middle of it. And that's where it turns out where the nutrition is going up. It's because the good soil management is creating better soil and better nutrition.

Well, any rate, this went on for months. We argued strongly in meetings that long-term research should not have a component that did "nothing." That was not organic farming. It was doomed to failure, as they apparently wanted it to be. We did finally succeed in getting the organic component included instead of the do-nothing plots. And we insisted that the project contract with local organic farmers as advisors on how to farm the plots organically. Thank God we did that. The UC people were completely clueless how to farm these plots organically. But all of this wrangling and drama resulted in all of us being kicked off the committee. Everybody that had a stake in organic farming was eliminated, except for one farmer who pretty much never said anything and went along with the UC folks at every turn. They had ram-rodded this thing down our throats and established this long-term project, which has been going, what, for more than fifteen years now or something. And they can't pull anything off of it useful other than Alison Mitchell's nutrition thing.

Yes, SB-872. That was that bill that got the money for the UC SAREP via Nicolas Petris. Thank God Nicholas was there. We would never have gotten it otherwise.

It was just amazing. The right person, the right time. I only wish the long-term outcome would have been much better.

California Certified Organic Farmers [CCOF] Part Two

Rabkin: While we're talking about this kind of history, what can you tell me about the founding of CCOF and its subsequent evolution? What were the ideals that guided the inception of CCOF? Have those changed over time? How has the organization dealt with continuing issues with organic certification, USDA standards?

Cantisano: Well, it seemed to me that the main issue that started CCOF was the fact that that Rodale program was leaving California, and the few farmers that had been certified and actually now established a market, wanted to have something. The guy's name was Floyd Allen, from Rodale. He came and helped organize that initial meeting. He had been out here doing that certifying for, I think, two years. Rodale decided that wasn't viable, that they couldn't do this national certification program thing.

So there needed to be an organic certifying deal, and nobody had done it. There weren't any rules. So CCOF organized this meeting to establish a set of ground rules for certification, self, in-house, voluntary certification, so that these farmers could continue to have some seal of approval. That seemed to be the main focus of that first meeting, which was—I think it was in Avila Beach.

Rabkin: That was the one where you felt a little uncomfortable because you weren't a farmer.

Cantisano: I thought that was a very narrow focus by them, which they needed to be broader. But anyway, that was my own take on it.

There were discussions about the other things CCOF could do, things like networking, and having a newspaper, and doing joint purchases, and co-op buys, and stuff. But none of that stuff really took off initially. The newspaper is the only thing I remember that really got going, and that was because of David Katz. David was farming Odyssey Orchards out by Winters, which was peaches and apricots, and so he had an interest in being certified. He was a college grad, and he had done something in communications previously, so he was comfortable with the idea of setting up a newsletter.

So that's my recollection, that it initially was basically get together and do certifications so that we had something that would give legitimacy to what was already going.

How has it evolved over time? Well, it went from a totally volunteer project—And bless Barney Bricmont's heart; he was a volunteer and trying to farm small-scale, running a statewide organization. Good luck. It was charging next to nothing for dues. It was a handshake relationship. It was a very short form. It was a very short set of rules. I don't remember all of them, but there were just a few pages. In 1979, when we passed the state law, that was eight pages in the

state legislature, and that was longer than what had been written in CCOF. So it was just a few pages of rules.

The way it worked was that a farmer would inspect another farmer. That was pretty much how the whole thing worked. And that worked pretty well. So CCOF pioneered that model, and then it was very active at establishing that state law, which we made voluntary. That was maybe our mistake at that time. We decided in '79 that it would be voluntary to become organic. There was no state mandate. You didn't have to go get registered. You didn't have to go get certified. But it codified what the term "organic" was. So if there was a complaint, then somebody could come back and say, "Well, that's what the law says you're supposed to be doing."

Rabkin: So people at that point could call themselves organic without having been certified?

Cantisano: Oh, yes.

Rabkin: I see.

Cantisano: That was true until the federal law. You could be state registered— In 1990, the law got rewritten, mostly by Mark Lipson.[41] He spent most of the time with that. They rewrote it to about a thirty-five-page law, which not only made it more detailed—because this time we had learned a lot more about the issues. In the seventies we just didn't know about all these issues that were going to come up, about materials especially. So at any rate, in 1990 they rewrote it, and they

made it both a requirement that you become registered—that was with the State Department of Agriculture. You paid a registration fee, and you filed a set of forms that described your farming practices. But even then, you didn't have to be certified. You had a choice.

There was some dollar cap on that. You could only be self-registered up to a certain amount of dollars. So CCOF was still at that time the only real certifier operating in California in '90. Well, there was OCIA. But they were really small.

Rabkin: What does that stand for?

Cantisano: Organic Crop Improvement Association. They're a group out of the Midwest. They were certifying a few grain farmers in California, because Midwest brokers were cutting most of the grain deals, and somehow they sent inspectors out here to certify the growers. That's how that all worked out. And Oregon Tilth was, of course, going, but they weren't doing hardly any certifying in California then. It was pretty much just CCOF.

So it wasn't till the federal law went into place that you actually had to be certified to be organic. And even now, if you have under $5,000 gross, which is a garden, you can call yourself organic and not be certified.

So anyway, that certification process came around there in the mid-seventies. We wrote a set of rules, established a logo, and formed a nonprofit. Cal Slewing became the president. He was a farmer, but he was a lawyer, so he had some idea of how to write bylaws, which was really helpful because nobody else did.

(laughter) They were clueless about the legal aspects of doing it. At least that's my recollection. It seemed like Cal was the guy that always had the: "This is how you do it. This is the legal part."

And then Barney ran it out of his house. And then eventually it grew past Barney, and Warren Weber took it over. I can't remember exactly what happened right then, but I know that Warren stepped up, and he became both the president and, to some degree, organized the office. I don't really know exactly what was happening right then, but Warren kind of took it out of what we were calling the Dark Ages. He tried to make it legitimate.

CCOF has become more businesslike as time has gone along, in response to the growth of the business and the industry. And it's also been a leader in that regard. A lot of the initial regulations came through the CCOF process. We were on committees that established the regulations for the materials, and for the farming practices, and for the labeling—all those different kinds of things. And those became, if not directly adopted into state or federal law—they became models for what became the state or the federal law eventually.

In many ways, CCOF was the activist group and it has been, still to this date. It seems to be still the number-one, farmer-based certifier. It's always maintained that role, even though now they've had to legally separate and have two separate organizations to comply with the USDA National Organic Program. But it's really been run at the behest of the farmers for the benefit of the farmers. People have always asked me, "Well, who should I get certified by?" And I always tell

them, quite honestly, "CCOF is the place to get certified because you are dealing with a farmer-based organization that's going to take your interests at heart, and it's not just going to be a business, slam-bang deal."

They've had to become more businesslike, but they still have that farmer bent, and that's really important. And they maintain their activity in all the political arenas.[42] That's the other thing, is that *none* of the other certifiers in California ever would show up at any political things. They never go to the legislature. They don't do that stuff. CCOF would actually be involved in backing legislation. Like, right now they're involved in the GMO [genetically modified organism] issues and the hemp issues. Those are things that *no* other certifier would ever touch. That's a lot to their credit.

To their detriment, I still think they don't do a good job of networking with their membership enough. That's actually still its weakest point. Their annual meetings are pretty weak. They don't really have a lot of process. They have a chapter approach to organizing, but those chapters are light on farmers to run those chapters, and it's a really, really difficult thing to do. So the only chapters that really succeeded was where they had a big enough acreage base so they could hire a part-time person to run the chapter. And that's why those chapters still remain active chapters. Otherwise, they've all pretty much dissolved, with the few exceptions of where there's a real good activist farmer involved. But typically it's hard to find those types of farmers.

But the fact that it was decentralized, it had chapters, was a good thing. Because that was the initial theory of those chapters— you would get together with your local buddies and get to have some camaraderie, share knowledge, and know that you had somebody local you could rely upon. But those have pretty much gone by the wayside as far as the social and the educational component. I don't see much of that going on anymore. Mostly chapter meetings are more about the nuts and bolts of certification. And that probably doesn't really serve the farmers adequately. I think that's maybe the area that, if I was going to give them one criticism, is they need a staff, somebody to actually do education. Now, they are doing this Going Organic program, which is a good step in the idea of teaching people how to go organic. That's a good thing. That's a good move, but that's still not quite the same thing as having people get together and share amongst each other on a regular basis.

And it's just had to get more into the national stuff. The other downside is (there's no knock on CCOF for this) but it's just become a bureaucratic paperwork nightmare to be certified now, in order to satisfy the federal law. It's so much more complicated and onerous. That's no blame on CCOF. They're just following the rules. I was just helping somebody last week who is going to get certified, who has put it off until now. Let's see, they could have been legally certified, I don't know, five years ago or something. And they've put it off. The farmer's going, "I don't want to do it." And the office lady is going, "I don't want to do it."

So we spent two hours going through the thing, and I said, "Well, it's not as onerous as it looks. Those thirty-five pages aren't as bad as it looks." But if you don't know the lingo and you don't know all the stuff it's very daunting. What CCOF really needs is an ombudsman. They need someone who actually goes out and helps people through this process. That would actually help a lot. But they've never really done that. I suggested it a long time ago. I even offered to be the ombudsman at one point, just sort of an ambassador of good will about organics. Because it's hard enough knowing the technical part, but then they got to know all this record-keeping and detailed book-work and lingo. And the lingo changes. What's okay today isn't necessarily okay next year. A lot of that goes right by farmers. They just don't pay that much attention to that stuff. I make part of my living helping people make sure they don't screw up on their CCOF application, to make sure they get the lingo right.

Rabkin: So in a sense you're [already] serving that ombudsman role, to some extent.

Cantisano: Yes, although I'd rather do it for a nonprofit than do it as a business. But, yes, I am in some regards. And, I have sent people to other certifiers that I thought were more appropriate for a particular crop, which they had more experience in. But typically I direct them to CCOF because it's still the best. Also, it's more honest. God, there's a bunch of these certifiers— You know, I know for a fact there are very high-profile certifiers that either do lousy jobs of inspecting, or lousy jobs of following what the inspector did.

Now, that's the other thing that changed. Now we have third-party inspectors, and they're trained by an outside sort of agency and all that. That's good. That makes a level of separation from the certifier. But if you don't hire a good inspector, or you don't require that inspector to do a good job, then the quality of your inspection is variable. And there're definitely people certified out there that shouldn't be. We've busted them. We know it. I have clients that have been certified by both CCOF and another certifier, and come back to me and go, "Man, those are as different as night and day on the inspections. It was a cakewalk with the other one. CCOF asked me all kinds of questions the other one never asked a word about." And, I'm like, hmm, you know? And then things would come up, and then we'd realize, yes, that certifier really is just in it as a business.

So CCOF, I will give them a lot of credit for actually sticking to the letter of the rules, and at the same time advocating things which are farmer-friendly, too, trying to make it work for farmers. So I think it's done a decent job. There are places I think it could be better.

Rabkin: Do you run into many organic farmers who are practicing organic techniques but have decided not to certify because of expense and/or paperwork problems?

Cantisano: Yes, not so much expense and paperwork, but their perception that they don't think they have a market for that organic crop. The most notable example of that is the wine grape industry. Wine, to this date, hasn't really taken off as an organic product. I would say of my wine grape clients that well over

half of them aren't certified, that are farming organically. Like this one I was just saying, I've been telling him, "Why don't you guys get certified? You can put it on the label." "Well, you know, nobody's looking for it. And it's a paperwork nightmare, so why do I want to do that?" And so it's kind of like, "Okay, you don't want to do that. All right, that makes sense."

I think in crops where there's a market, generally speaking, the reason they wouldn't be certified is not because of the paperwork. What I have seen people do is move away [because they] jumped into it thinking that it was going to be a cakewalk economically from the marketing standpoint, and it didn't turn out to be that way. There was a lot more competition than they thought, and so products didn't sell as readily. And maybe they didn't completely become decertified, but they decertified some of their acreage because they had a market in a conventional deal, and it was working, and it's easier to farm conventionally, and the organic thing wasn't necessarily a big enough market. I see some people leave for that. I can only think of two in all this time who have left it because it was just too technically hard. They just didn't like the challenge of farming organically. But not so much for the paperwork. But they all bitch and moan about it. Everybody just goes, "God, it's just— It's terrible."

Rabkin: I heard a story or two at Eco-Farm this year from people who are practicing immaculately organic techniques, but for one reason or another would like to certify but feel they can't. For example, on the young farmers panel, there was a young guy who's raising grass-fed beef, but he leases or rents his land, and a big part of the certification process applies to the land itself.

Cantisano: Sure.

Rabkin: And he never knows from year to year whether he's going to get kicked off this land and have to go somewhere else.

Cantisano: That's a big challenge with places that you lease, because you don't know the longevity of it. That's a legitimate concern, and I can see why people wouldn't do that. The other example of that is you never know what your landlord is going to do. I know of a job happening right now on a leased ranch. The farmer got it certified. The landowner got an offer for higher rent from another farmer who needed a piece of certified land, and the landowner said, "Bye-bye. I'm gonna rent it to somebody else." So that's the challenge of leasing property, is that you're at the mercy of the landowner. And if there's a demand, and sometimes there is, where pricing of acreage goes up and somebody is willing to pay it, and somebody else is not, the current tenant may be screwed. So the guy did all the time and money and transition. I think he farmed it two years as certified, and now he's gone. So yes, if you don't own your land, that is one of the challenges to becoming certified.

And a lot of people can't get more than year-to-year leases, and that's a challenge, too. More people are now going for longer-term leases, especially in the organic thing, because if you're going to transition a piece of land then you've got to have at least that. I'd say a five-year lease is a minimum, because otherwise, you're going to do the three years of transition, and you're going to not reap any benefit.

I don't hear that as much of an issue as I would have expected. I thought this would be a big problem. I don't know that it's that big of a barrier. The cost is a big barrier to some people, the actual cost of being certified. I hear a lot of people complaining about that. Because it can get into the thousands of dollars. If you're making many thousands of dollars it's not an issue. But if you're not, that's an issue. I hear people moaning about that more than the paperwork fiasco part of it, or the lack of land tenancy to permanence.

Land Prices and Other Pressures on Organic Agriculture

Rabkin: During the '08 Eco-Farm bus tour, as we were traveling through the Pajaro Valley, you were pointing out a number of changes in the land: development pressures, loss of agricultural land, [rising] land prices, water shortages. Can you talk about how those shifts are affecting organic farmers?

Cantisano: Yes, in a lot of different ways. Well, a few things have happened. One is that land price, cost of rent has gotten up high enough that making a living off the leased ground is very difficult. On the Central Coast, very few farmers own their own land. It's rare in the organic business to own your land. The exceptions to the rules are the Jerry Thomases and the Betty Van Dykes and the Jim Riders—somebody who's been in it for multiple generations. Those people own land. But, most of the people I work with in the Central Coast are on rented ground. In vegetables, it's clearly that way. So there's that issue. Rents continue to escalate because there's more land development pressure, so land is being taken out of production agriculture, and being put into its highest use, which is development.

There's still pretty much the same amount of land being farmed or wanting to be farmed, so that puts pressure on the remaining land base to raise its rates. The other thing that happens is farmers move to areas where land rents are less, but the land quality is less. Then they're ending up not getting the kind of yields or quality that they had historically. So that is a transition. I've seen a few farms have to move out of the Central Coast, or move to the far reaches of Hollister, or Tres Piños, or some place out where the ground isn't as good, in order to survive. So that's a big issue.

Then there are places that people have just flat out lost to development. I have a client that just lost it last year in Salinas, a strawberry producer. The land went to development. It had been on the market for a number of years, and finally somebody bought it. That's a challenge of leased agriculture.

The other thing, of course, is salinization is going on, which is mostly ag-related. You can't blame that too much on urbanization. The amount of water pumping is definitely drawing more saline water into the coastal aquifer, and that is reducing land quality and/or productivity and causing people to move to other areas.

There was such a boom in the organic vegetable business there ten years ago that a whole bunch of land got transitioned that really didn't have a home for the food. People were kind of thinking ahead: We're going to transition this ground here and that ground there, and then we'll grow this crop there. And that didn't

happen for various reasons: the market slowed down; or consolidation, which is really typical; or market share just went to somebody else, which happens, too.

So actually, believe it or not, there is a fair amount of organic land for rent right now in Salinas and Watsonville that hasn't been around for years. The last two years, ground has come up for availability that nobody is taking. Typically, of course, it's either the poorest quality or the highest priced. Take your pick. So people are shifting their land base to where economically it's viable, or quality, or climate or something that fits their niche better.

But, yes, there's actually quite a bit of land, maybe it's five or ten percent of the acreage that's out there certified isn't being farmed. I never thought that would ever happen. I was always thinking we'd be short of land.

And then, let's see, what else is changing in the Central Coast? Well, there's more pressure on the higher-value crops, so ground is going more into things like raspberries and wine grapes, and less into row crops, because there's more money in those crops, whether it's organic or conventional. But that does eat up row-crop land, and so row-crop land, the good row-crop land, is still kind of at a premium.

That's the changes I'm noticing. And there are the more subtle things like people are drilling wells deeper now because the water table is dropping, so the pumping costs are higher.

And because of urbanization, there are less and less animals around, and so there are less and less sources of manure for compost. So manure has to be hauled in from farther and farther away. And that's raising the cost of making compost. That's been a notable change.

Rabkin: Wow, that's a component of food miles that I never thought about: manure miles.

Cantisano: It has become really obvious. There are just less and less animals. The dairies are almost all gone. There are almost no chicken operations; there're no turkey operations left. So there's just less and less manure. And that's a base component of compost. So almost everybody in the Central Coast that makes compost commercially is trucking it from Los Baños or farther away, because that's where the dairies are now. That's a trend that I've really seen in the last, less than ten years. Ten years ago, there was still quite a bit of material around.

Oh, and that's another trend. I will say, on the other extreme, there's a lot more use of city, urban landscape wastes going back into organic agriculture. There's a lot of composting of those materials, the street trimmings, or yard waste, they call it. There's definitely quite a bit of that being used. So that's a change.

And then the other trend (you got to be honest) is consolidation. I don't know what the statistics are, but it seems like there are fewer producers of vegetables. There're a lot of small ones, but if you add up all their acreage, it pales in comparison to the few large ones that are out there. And they just keep

swallowing up the business. They keep expanding, and taking over more and more acres, which I don't think is necessarily a healthy trend.

Rabkin: This is the Earthbound Farm type phenomenon?

Cantisano: They're the biggest of them, but yes, there are plenty of them like that. In fact, they're probably the most expansionary of all of them, but even they've slowed down because the economics have kind of cooled off on that whole deal. But that does tend to put pressure on the smaller growers. So a lot of the smaller growers are now growing for Earthbound, or Mission Organics, or Pure Pacific, or one of the other bigger players, and they're no longer doing their own label.

Rabkin: Is that a result of inexorable market pressures, or is it a trend that might reverse? How do you see that going?

Cantisano: Well, it's pretty hard to compete with somebody that's got a year-round supply of a branded item and a lot of different types of product in the supermarket world. So I don't think you're going to see a whole lot more competition in the supermarket world. The place where the diversified smaller farmer is going to be able to continue to thrive is in the direct marketing world. That's the CSAs, and the farmers' markets, and selling to retail, local stores. That market is going to continue to grow. There's a growing, educated, consuming population that wants to buy those products and is more interested in the food-mile conversation, and local, and organic, and fresh. I think there'll always be a growth in that area. It seems like that's where people are making money.

The hardest part right now is the medium-size farm. It's the hundred-, two-hundred-, three-hundred-acre operations, at least in the Central Coast. They seem like they're the most endangered. They're not big enough to really shake the stake with the big boys on the wholesale business, and they're really too big to do the direct marketing. That's where the shakeout's happening. They either are consolidating, or they're leasing out land to somebody else, or they're farming for Earthbound, or Dole, or somebody else, under their label. That seems to be the more of a trend going on with that medium-size operation. That may turn out to be the group that will be the most impacted. They're big family operations. They're not mega-corporate deals. But they're not family little operations, either. Those ones look to me like they've been struggling. With a few exceptions. Everything's got an exception. Phil Foster is in one of those medium-scale operations doing great. But Phil's got a very strong marketing niche, and he's done a good job, and he's been able to fight off the Earthbound monolith. [laughter] But Phil's what I would call an exception to the rule. He's done well. But he's also gotten much more diversified. One of his strategies to survive is just to keep diversifying into more and more crops, which is a good strategy.

The medium-size operations are going to be struggling, and I don't think you're going to see much growth in that area in the Central Coast. Now, you go into a medium-size operation in the San Joaquin Valley, a hundred, two hundred acres in tree fruit, that's a different story. Or almonds, walnuts, something like that. Still, you're going to see growth in those because that's something that you can still individually market, be able to have a niche.

But the Central Coast, I think, is going to be seeing two divergent growths: small farms and super farms, and not much in between, from what I can see.

Rabkin: You've served as a consultant and adviser to organic farmers for a long time now, and I'm wondering who your mentors and models have been.

Cantisano: I'd have to say that a lot of my farmer clients are my models and mentors. I don't ever come to a farm with all the pieces of the puzzle. They've got a big chunk of it, and I'm adding just a little piece or two into the conversation to make their system work better. So some of my best mentors have been really good farmers already, whether they were conventional or organic farmers. It just depends on the crop. If I were talking about grapes, I'd say my friend Steve Pavich was a fantastic mentor. He's a really good farmer for—well, now he's been organic since the mid-seventies, so pretty much his entire life. And he's very skillful as a farmer.

Another great farmer who I converted locally, Ernie Bierwagen, who's since passed away, was a fantastic fruit farmer before he ever knew the word "organic." He had all those basic skills of farming that I took my bits and pieces from. And I added my bits and pieces of the, "How do you do this without the chemicals part of it." Ernie, like Grandpa Rouse, had farmed before the era of chemicals, so he had all that intrinsic knowledge and the practical knowledge.

I have tons of heroes. The Lundbergs. Although I've never grown any of their crops, I really admire their role and model of how they operate as a family and as a business. It's a very unique business model, to be able to now be in the third

and fourth generation running the business, and to be able to have brought in all their neighboring farmers to get involved in the growing for the marketing of their products, and to diversify. Like I mentioned earlier, when I first met them, they had a hundred-pound sack of rice. Now they have almost 150 products.

Rabkin: Wow.

Cantisano: They're the second biggest employer in the county, in an area that's all on welfare. That entire county is ag welfare.

Rabkin: What county is Lundberg in?

Cantisano: Butte. It's a welfare county. If they weren't getting subsidies and outright payments, there wouldn't be anybody farming there, other than almonds and walnuts. The Lundbergs are doing fantastic, and they employ a lot of people. So those are heroes.

Russel Wolter was a hero, because Russel knew how to do it from the seat of the pants. He just knew: this is how you grow broccoli, and this is how you cultivate.

Oh, and then my strawberry clients. Like Roy Fuentes.[43] He's one of the most amazing farmers I've ever met. Roy is just— God, he just knows tons. He started as a farm worker, and he worked his way up. You were on the bus tour, so you saw his talk. We didn't talk about strawberries [on the bus tour], but Roy knows so much about strawberries. Strawberries are a very, very demanding crop. I mean, to grow a good strawberry, you are really a good farmer. There's no doubt about it. He is a really great farmer. So he's been a really good mentor.

I don't think any of these guys would ever think of themselves as mentors to me. I'm hired to give advice, and simultaneously I'm picking their brains, too, because they're always thinking of new stuff. Everybody's thinking new ideas. You know: here's how you're going to do this.

Warren Weber is a good mentor. He showed me a lot of stuff. You know, you just meet people and you go, wow, this guy or gal is really thinking.[44]

Amy Courtney. I've only been around Amy a couple of times, but I love the way she thinks. That's a hero.

Jim Cochran, because of his whole interest in the labor issue.[45] Very important. Jim thinks on a much bigger picture than most farmers, because he came from a labor activist background. He's got that in him. He's got a bigger picture than being a strawberry farmer; he's thinking about that whole process of how to work with his workers.

Rabkin: He has a UFW contract with his workers.

Cantisano: Yes, and he's the only one. He's the only organic farmer with a UFW contract in the country.

Rabkin: Why is that? Why aren't there more?

Cantisano: Hmm, that's a challenging one to say. I think that one thing is that the UFW carries a stigma with it that a lot of farmers, organic or not, just aren't comfortable with.

Rabkin: What's the stigma about?

Cantisano: That they play heavy hands. I mean, I know the people who are UFW certified or organized, and the UFW plays hardball. They're not the easiest group of people to get along with. You don't want to be on the wrong side of them. So they carry that. There's the fear also that farmers are going to get found out if they get unionized; then we're going to deal with the whole issue of the fact that the immigration—ninety-eight percent of them are illegal. We asked this Central Coast labor contractor who's got a huge crew there in Salinas. He goes, "Oh, I bet it's one in a hundred that I have working for me is legal." And he's got three or four hundred employees. So now you bring in the UFW. Now you got another level of scrutiny, and then you got people looking at you, and you got the Labor Relations Board involved in your life, and you've got that little oversight deal.

Farmers don't want to be at an economic disadvantage, and I'll say this in as benign a way as I can say it. I have a wine-grape client in the Salinas Valley that's UFW certified or organized. His labor rate is two dollars an hour higher than anybody else in the wine-grape business in the Salinas Valley. So he's at a two-dollar-an-hour economic disadvantage on every hour he employs somebody. So what is he doing? Going mechanical on everything he can figure out, so he can cut down on labor. That's the antithesis of what I'd like to see, to get people employed at a good wage.

The other thing is that I think a lot of organic farmers think of themselves as treating their employees better than average already. Now, that may be

delusional. That may not be accurate, but I do know that many of them pay better than the average wage in their area. They also, in some cases, give them bonuses and premiums and insurance and stuff that others don't pay. So that's probably the other thing.

Jim [Cochran's] an exception. Jim was the management who decided to get organized. All other UFW things come the other direction. That's disgruntled employees wanting to get the management on the dime. Well, most farm workers (probably partly because they're illegal) don't want to raise any hackles. They don't want anybody to come and check up on them. So there's not the urgency to go get your boss in trouble and get him unionized if that's going to threaten your viability of living in California.

That's my take on it. If you asked farm workers, you'd probably get some other reasons, but that's what I sense in it.

Rabkin: Mm-hm, it makes sense.

Cantisano: I don't think that they would have ever gotten UFW done there if it wasn't for Jim. I don't think any of the farm workers would have went, "Uh, let's get organized." I don't think so. I think Jim, bless his heart, was the one that stepped forward, and I give him a lot of credit for being that person. That's a very unique human being. I can't think of too many others that would have done that. [laughter] No, I don't know anybody else.

I think that economic thing's a big deal. If you're going to pay two bucks an hour and then— Oh, and then my friend also, who pays two bucks [more] an hour, last year told me—I don't know about this year, but last year he spent $90,000 in lawyers—

Rabkin: [Sharp intake of breath.]

Cantisano: —to fight with the UFW at meetings. And what are they fighting over? Well, there's going to be a two-dollar-and-ten-cent difference versus a two-dollar difference. Ninety grand, that's a lot of money. Now, this is a big farm. It's a couple thousand acres of grapes, so ninety grand gets divided out a long ways. But if you start taking that 2,000 acres of grapes and thinking how many extra hours times two you got in there, we're talking a lot of money. That's a big deal. That's what I sense, anyway.

Organic Farm Advisor

Rabkin: Okay. All right. Well, we've been looking at the big picture for a while, and I want to jump back and catch the thread of your own trajectory, which we sort of left off when you were beginning to transition out of Peaceful Valley. We didn't really talk about how you got from the farm supply business into being a full-time consultant.

Cantisano: Oh, yes. That's an interesting one, too. Well, the farm supply business started in a barn and then it moved up the street into a building, and it was getting bigger and bigger, and I was having more and more employees. And

because, apparently, we were the only really organic farm supply, people were coming from all over the state and all over the country eventually, and the phones were ringing off the hook all the time. People had a lot of really detailed questions. Oftentimes I didn't either have the answer or the time to answer them. I needed to do research or talk to somebody else on their farm, another farmer, try and get some more details.

A lot of it was not about what input to use. It was more like cultural things and practices that were outside of the purview of farm supply. They were asking for things like information on rotations and composting projects and biological control—a lot of things that weren't things that we were necessarily supplying, but I realized they were actually equally as important. I had been teaching these classes and workshops at numerous events and doing this also for the Eco-Farm. I taught a lot of classes in the eighties, and workshops and seminars and transition conferences and stuff. I was starting to get more known. People were calling up, because there weren't very many people doing this yet. And these people were calling up, asking, "Well, what do *you* know about this? I want to convert this," or, "I'm doing this, and I'm having this problem," or, you name the scenario. I felt like I was giving them, a lot of times, short shrift on the phone. It was, like, "Yeah, [makes muttering sounds]."

And then through some of my friends, I would actually go out and spend a bunch of time getting to know them and their challenges—like Russel or somebody else who I knew well. I'd go spend a couple, three hours and realize, it really takes quite a while to get into an in-depth conversation and get to a lot of

the details. I never was going to be able to do it in this format on the telephone, or talking at a seminar, either. You talk at a seminar, and you can take questions for a while, but they all have to be sort of sound-bite answers that don't have much detail to them.

So that was the impetus. I started just taking days off here and there. I had an assistant manager, and I told Mark, "Mark, I'm going to go out and visit some farms," just for my own well being and because I was getting people calling me up. So I would just travel for a day—drive a couple of hours someplace and go over and visit one or two places and come back. And I realized that there was actually a niche. There wasn't anybody doing organic farm advising at the time. I found out subsequently I opened the first organic farm advising business in the country. I didn't know that, but I did.

Rabkin: When did you officially open your doors?

Cantisano: Well, I started doing it in '85, but it was part time because I was doing the business. I sold Peaceful Valley in '89, and I became a full-time consultant in '89, which interestingly—just by coincidence—coincided with Alar Sunday. And it was, like, this total wild scene— All of a sudden, the phone's ringing off the hook. Now all these people wanted to go organic, and the thing about then, you could become certified organic in a year. You only had that one-year transition. So all of a sudden these conventional farmers were coming out of the woodwork, wanting to go organic, because they saw these prices of organic going skyrocketing, and the demand was really high. There wasn't the product out

there. People were calling from all over the West Coast. I was turning them down from everywhere else but the West Coast, but there were people calling from all over the country. I was going, "I can't go back. I can't work with your farm in Virginia. I don't know anything about Virginia."

So I sold the [Peaceful Valley Farm Supply] business to Mark Fenton and his wife Kathleen, two of my employees. I had wanted to do it for a while because I was kind of getting frustrated. We had sixteen employees. It was just that I really had not gotten into the business to run a business. I wanted to supply farmers and be involved with them, but it became more and more business details and management and employee relationship stuff, and I just wasn't enjoying that very much.

I also wanted to go back to farming if I could. I still had a lease on a farm, and I was farming some, but it was all really hit and miss and not enough time to do it. I had a farm partner, so he was doing most of the work, and I was really interested in doing more of it myself. So I decided to sell the business to Mark and Kathleen, and then as soon as soon as I put out my shingle the phone started ringing off the wall.

So I was off and running. I would have had plenty of business even if Alar Sunday hadn't happened, but it went from, oh, I got enough to do, to, geez, I spent '89 and '90 just driving constantly around, everywhere. I spent most of my days gone. Go out on the road for a week or so. My kids were missing me. It got

to be really challenging. It was really a hard time for a while. And very stressful on my relationship.

But there was so much interest, and nobody else was doing it. There were a few people that were interested in biological control, and they would supply some information, but to try and do the whole picture for folks, I was the only one at the time doing it.

Rabkin: What kinds of questions, problems, and issues did farmers bring you, mostly?

Cantisano: Well, most of them are practical, production practice issues. My niche has been, predominantly whom I've worked with, are conventional farmers becoming organic, or fairly new organic farmers. I do have clients who've been at it a while, but most of them have been really pretty new at it. So a lot of it is the basics. It's, how do I manage my soil without chemical fertilizers? What's a cover crop? And what's this compost thing, and how do I buy or make good compost? What else do I need to supplement my field with, and how do I read a soil test, and how am I going to deal with this pest that I have that I've been spraying with pesticides? What are my choices? What kind of irrigation practices are going to maximize productivity or reduce weed pressure? Tools. You got lots of questions about equipment, stuff that people are looking for. Disease management.

And then, a wide range of things—from cultural practices, to variety selection, to rotations, to marketing advice, production, processing advice. I kind of get

dragged into a little bit of everything. I don't really have much experience in the processing end other than my own olive business, and I've worked with projects with people that do products, but I really don't think that's my area of expertise.

Most of my clients are in the fruits, grapes, berries and vegetables. I've worked in animal crops and I've worked in field crops, too, but most of them are in the specialty horticultural crops. And flowers. There are quite a bit in flowers, and some in culinary herbs. Questions are different all the time. A lot of it has to do with how far they are down the curve of becoming organic. For some growers, the first conversation, two or three are: "What's it like to be organic? What am I going to fall into? What are my challenges? What do I have to look for as [far as] problems? What do I have to plan in advance for? What are the rules? How do I get certified?" Those kinds of things. Those are big issues. "What are the risks? What are the markets?" So it really varies. Most of them tend to be technical, practical, "how do I do it?" questions.

Rabkin: I'm picturing every farmer who makes the decision to transition—fruit and vegetable farmer in California makes that decision—and each one of them is going to have all these kinds of questions. And you're saying that you are the only—

Cantisano: *Were.*

Rabkin: You at first were the only professional organic ag adviser in the state. It sounds like an impossible situation.

Cantisano: I think in the country. Well, fortunately they didn't all find me—thank God—number one. And number two, they find the information in bits and pieces from other places. And they make more mistakes, typically. My job, I perceive, is to help them make less mistakes. They are going to make them anyway, but I'm going to cut down the learning curve a bit. So what would happen more commonly, at least initially back there in the eighties, was people would make a lot of mistakes. The first couple of years were really kind of a rough road.

Now there are more places to ask or find out, or farm supplies or vendors of things, and a few more consultants, so that you can actually get some experience, information before you jump into it. That was why we started this Eco-Farm and the sustainable-ag conferences, was to get conventional farmers to see how other people did it, so they could actually get a sense of—oh, yes, this is how you manage alfalfa weevil or codling moth. You could see what people are doing, so then you could come back and decide if that's something you want to take along on your own set of practices or not.

But, yes, I think a lot of people struggle without much technical advice. And some crops are harder than others to succeed at, but I think I still make myself valuable by providing timely information that cuts down the learning curve. If I don't save them money, they don't keep me around. That's really the goal of it: I'm going to save them money. I've saved some people some huge amounts of money. I wish I had charged them anywhere close to what I had saved them, or made them.

I think, again, you could go around, you can ask every single person that had gone organic why they wanted it, and you could get a range of why they did. But usually technical answers aren't the reasons that stop them from going organic. They can find them if they look hard enough now. It's easier now. It was harder then. When I was first starting doing this in the eighties, mid-eighties, there just wasn't much information around. Now, you can go on the Web, or you can ask a neighbor, or you can go to a CCOF meeting, or something—you're going to find some of the basics.

I've always instructed people to just start small. A lot of people don't pay attention to me. They just go for it. But I say, "Look, you're going to make some mistakes doing this, so why don't you just start at a scale that if you make a mistake, it's not going to threaten your economic viability and you're not going to have a lot of sleepless nights?" Doesn't always stop them. I have a lot of clients who just go for it and I say, "You're doing what?! You're going to do all of these acres and you've never done an acre of it? Oh, my God." To the point where I stopped having a listed phone number at my house.

That was a real problem in the early nineties. I'd get calls at three and four in the morning, and five in the morning. People are stressing because they've jumped too far into this thing, and they're, like, "WHAT DO I DO NEXT? WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN NOW?!" So I said no, that's it. No more listed phone number. They call my office number. They call my cell phone. That was a self-preservation moment. My wife would say, "What are you doing, man? You're

talking to these people at four in the morning about stuff that can wait till eight." And I'm, like, "I don't know. They're calling *me* up."

I can't say I honestly chose how I was going to do this: "Oh, I'm going to help these farmers go organic." It's sort of (chuckles), as is most of my projects, they appeared, and I took them on, and I did it, to a lesser or better degree, depending on the client.

Rabkin: Do you have a more comfortable workload now?

Cantisano: Yes. I turn down jobs. I don't travel as far as I used to. And that panic rush isn't there anymore for people who go organic. That's just not quite the way it is, because you've got a three-year process, and you got to really think the process through. I was killing myself in the nineties. I can't do that anymore. I've got it down to where I could even could take a few more clients on if I wanted to, but I haven't really been trying. I'm lousy at selling myself. I'm not good at that at all, so if they don't want it already, I'm not likely to actually get a client. I never would be a good salesman. I mean, at Peaceful Valley I don't think I ever sold a thing.

Rabkin: It sounds like you never had to be.

Cantisano: No, I just steered them towards what I thought was the best tool for what result they were trying to get. But to actually go out and convince somebody to do this or that—[clicks tongue]. It's not my style. I mean, some people say they're good at that, but that wouldn't be me. I couldn't do that. So

right now, I just don't go out and pressure people to pursue my services. And I haven't been getting invited to speak at as many workshops and conferences, so my name doesn't get out quite as far as it used to, which is okay with me. I've still got plenty of income, and it's given me a chance to actually work on this farm.

Heaven and Earth Farm

Rabkin: Tell me about this farm, Heaven and Earth.

Cantisano: Well, this is our [counts to himself] sixth farm. We've had different ones over the years. They've always been leased. I never had any money. This is the first one. We bought a farm because my wife inherited twenty grand, so we had some money for a down payment. We've done different things over the years. We've grown vegetables and fruits and orchards, and in the nineties I got real big into olives. I did at one point about sixty-five acres of olives, and I did my own processing and oil making. For varying reasons, we didn't find it very satisfying emotionally. It wasn't even great financially, but it wasn't very satisfying emotionally. It ended up being one of those things where we had to market stuff a long ways away, and for high prices that we weren't really comfortable with, and little specialty bottles. My wife especially was really down on it. She said, "Like, why are we doing this? It's not our basic roots." But I had been making olive oil since the seventies, and this orchard came into my hands—an opportunity, and I leased it, and one thing led to another, and off and running, I was going.

Actually, we didn't close that business until 2003. But, like I said, we were landless farmers. We didn't own anything. Then my kids were all grown up and gone off, except for my youngest daughter, who was still living with us at the time. She was about twenty. And we said, what do we do next? The olive business wasn't satisfying. People loved our products, gave us rave reviews. And we won a bunch of competitions. We knew we were on the right track as far as quality and stuff, but I don't know, it just wasn't doing it.

So we said, what do we want to do next? We talked about it a lot. We said, actually, we want to go back to more of our roots, which was small-scale, diversified vegetable and fruit and flower farming, and do more teaching, get more people involved on the farm. We'd had varying people along the way that we'll call apprentices, without terming them that over the years, or we taught them much in the different orchards and farms we had. But we really didn't have a concerted effort to try and actually do education.

It was really obvious—it still is to me—that the median age of agriculture is still way too high. There are very few young people. We were really fortunate. We got into agriculture because Grandpa Rouse gave us a piece of land and let us farm it, and didn't charge us anything, and let us use the tractors. You just don't get those kinds of opportunities very often. I would have never got into farming if it weren't for his generosity and the fact that his two grandsons were part of it.

So we thought, let's buy a place. I'd lived up on the [San Juan Ridge] here in the early seventies and I bought into a piece of land that is on the Middle Fork of the

Yuba, but it's not farmland. We just bought it as a retreat, with a couple of friends of ours. It was really cheap. So I'd been coming back and forth on the Ridge a lot, and I'd done a bunch of consulting. Actually, I've even done some consulting at this place when it was a garden.

So a friend of mine, who's a farmer that lives two properties over, I was over to visit him one day, and I said, "We're thinking we want to buy a place. We've got a little bit of money." And he said, "Oh, well, these people on the road, they want to move to town. The kids are growing up, and they want to live in town."

We bought this place in 2000. It's eleven acres. We've developed about three and a half, four acres of it into orchards and gardens. We're trying to do diversified farming. We've got a little bit of everything except not many animals yet. I have done a lot of animals in the past, and I was trying to take a break from that. I have chickens and bees. I might get back into goats. I'm not sure if we're going to do that again or not. We're talking about it.

We do mostly direct marketing. We did a CSA for a few years, and kind of backed off of that. That was a little bit too stressful. I got real sick a couple of years ago, and I'm trying not to be sick again. A big contributor to that was stress, and I just don't want to repeat that conversation. So two years ago we stopped the CSA, because it was too stressful. While it was satisfying in a lot of ways, it was stressful in a lot of ways. It's a challenging climate to produce crops in, and so we stopped the CSA. So we mostly do restaurants, natural food stores

and farmers' markets. We sell to one local catering company that processes some of our stuff. We do our own processing at a local certified kitchen.

We've been focused on training young farmers. We started that in 2000, end of 2000, and we've had maybe twenty or so come through here so far, of which four of them have turned out actually to be farmers. So I'm feeling pretty good. I got four kids up and running.

Rabkin: Wow.

Cantisano: Including the young man who is now my farm partner, Seth. He was an apprentice here in'01, '02 and part of '03.

Rabkin: This is Seth Rosmarin?

Cantisano: Seth, yes. And then Seth went off on his own and worked for John, who's leasing that property [Mountain Bounty Farm] from Steve Beckwitt.

Rabkin: John Tecklin.

Cantisano: John Tecklin. And then he was doing landscaping and gardening around, and he came back last fall and said, "I really want to farm." I'd had a young woman here who was a pretty good apprentice, who I graduated to a farm manager. She's now farming in Paraguay. She moved on, and so I said, "Okay, if you want to do this." I was actually trying to take it easy. I was going to just keep the stuff irrigated and really not grow anything but annuals. But he was hot to trot on growing stuff again. So then that, of course, necessitated getting

some more people involved. So he got this one man, Adam, and then a young woman's coming on Monday, and then we're interviewing one more. So we'll probably have three apprentices.

We do direct, renegade marketing and try and grow high-quality things in a challenging climate. And we do classes. Like, we're teaching one on Saturday, an organic gardening class, to locals. And we've got a series of eight classes for this year that we're going to teach on different subjects: mushroom production, fermentation techniques, greenhouse management, composting, and food preservation and baking. We're trying to slowly turn this into an educational farm. I still do my farm advising to make the money to pay the bills. This farm is still learning how to make its way. I'm really interested in getting people a diverse set of skills so they can go away. And even out of those other fifteen that aren't farmers, more than half of them are landscapers or working in nurseries or something. They got their feet wet. They want to be in agriculture in some version. Not all of them have figured out where their spot is, but I'm feeling pretty good that I do a decent job of training them. They get a pretty broad-spectrum experience, and if they wanted to they can go out and really take it someplace.

So that's what we're doing here. I keep expanding the perennials. I just planted some more raspberries, some more strawberries and keep adding more perennials in. And then we're also doing this nursery project, which is getting some of these historic, heirloom perennial plants propagated, so that's our other little niche. We also go out identifying these very old productive food-producing

plants, so now we have a whole log of the cultural characteristics and harvest dates and quality about these plants from all these different properties around. So I try to get the kids involved in that.

We've been taking care of the old trees in a local state park. Malakoff Diggings State Park is an old mining camp, and has a bunch of Felix Gillet-era trees in it, so we take care of those trees: prune them and pick them and try to keep the bears out of them.

They get a broad experience on a wide variety of subjects. Classes in hands-on, practical, day-to-life living with an aging hippie. We teach them how to cook, and preserve food and save seeds and propagate and so much more. That's really important to me. I'm really interested in the next generation getting into agriculture. My son looks like he might come back here to farm at some point.

Rabkin: Is that the son who went to the UCSC program?

Cantisano: Yes, and he's now bought his piece of land, and we'll see what he does with that. And then I've got one daughter who's a gardener. Well, they're all gardeners, but one other daughter who's a pretty hotshot gardener, and she had a CSA for a couple of years. My kids are involved in it, but I still want to see more young people in this. It's really heartening to see so many young people at the Eco-Farm. That's a change that's been a really good sign.

But still, the opportunities to get into agriculture are few and far between. So we thought we'd figure out a way. Seth's good and he'll stick around, and if I'll get

another apprentice who wants to stick around, I'll make him a co-manager, and we'll just keep expanding it from there and work on it on that kind of level.

I don't really have the need to be the guy in charge. I'd rather have them tell me what to do, honestly, and then be the mentor. So I'm encouraging Seth to make ninety percent of the decisions. He checks in with me on many things, but a lot of it's, like, "Okay, what do you think? Yes, okay, let's do that. Okay." There's a little inherent risk in that, but what I learned is if you don't make mistakes, you don't grow. I take a little bit of that along and say, okay, there's going to be some mistakes made by this enthusiastic young man, but he's also going to "get it." That's how I did it. I made a lot of mistakes. So I'm just, "Okay, go for it. Go for your instincts, and you'll learn, and then next year you'll refine it, and the next year." Agriculture is just one of those things you keep refining. It doesn't come with the instant on-off switch. You get a piece of it, and then the next part kind of appears. It's like peeling an onion. You don't get the next layer for a year or two.

He's getting it. He's got three seasons of apprenticing, and now one year of being a farmer, so he's really in his fourth year of being in agriculture, and that's still pretty young. And it's just the beginning of this year, so he's really got only three seasons under his belt. But he's got good instincts. He's a really observing kid. That was the other reason I wanted him to be a farmer. He's the most observant of all the young people that have been here. He's one of those people who go, "Hey, what's going on here?" which is a very important skill. To be a good farmer is to be a good observer. He had the skills.

The other woman who was here before wasn't as good an observer, but she was an incredible worker and really skilled, but just doesn't have quite the intuitive stuff. There are different kinds of styles. But anyway, so she's off farming. I'm all thrilled about her being a farmer. She's doing great. She moved in with a group of people in Paraguay and they are farming this ground down there. It's like, "Okay, whatever you want, Marcía."

So I feel like this is an incubator, both this farm, which is still growing into what it's going to be, and then the young people that are involved with it, too. So we'll see. Ask me in ten years what I've done with it, because I'm hoping this is where I get to retire, but we'll see if that turns out to be the case.

But it's a good place to come back home to. I like the climate here. It's harder to grow here than any place in the valleys. This is much more challenging. But when you do a good job and you're proud of it, you go, oh, we did well with this. So I like it. And I like a lot of people around here. It's a good community, and there are a lot of people interested in this kind of food locally. For such a rural area, we actually have a high population of pretty educated, hip food eaters, so we have a good market, which is nice, too. You don't have to go out there and chase a market. And we don't have many farms around, so it's a good opportunity for us because we can grow what we want and find a home for it. As long as it's good quality, they'll buy it enthusiastically.

I'm trying to get more people to farm locally. That's my hope. But the cost of land and all that—just getting into agriculture is horribly expensive right now.

The Future of Organic Agriculture

Rabkin: Let's back up, as we begin to close the interview. I'm interested in your perspective, as someone who has watched organic agriculture develop in California and in the West for a few decades now, what you're seeing as the biggest challenges and the biggest opportunities for the future.

Cantisano: Well, I think that one of the biggest challenges is keeping the integrity of it. I think it gets diluted when it gets real large and marketed on a huge, mass-market scale. I think that's a challenge. There are some of the larger players that are active in the integrity part of it. So, again, there are exceptions to all rules. But a lot of them really couldn't give a rat's ass. All they're looking for is the bottom line. So that's an important part.

I also recognize that we're still just a scratch on the fanny of agriculture after all these years. I've done it thirty-five years, and what is it, two percent of the land is now organic? You pick your statistic from wherever you want but it's somewhere well under five percent. The vast majority of the land is still farmed with chemicals. So I feel like that's a big challenge and a big future. If we're going to have a truly sustainable system, we're going to have to see a lot greater transition of land.

And then the other part of that is, I came from that co-op movement, "Food for People Not for Profit," and I'm constantly challenged with the fact that organic food has become priced to the point that my kids can't buy it. And yet they do.

They spend an extra amount of their income in order to purchase it, but I can see that that's a big stretch for young people. I don't like that. I think that we need to get quality, unpoisoned, organic, life-giving food to all incomes of people. It needs to be more valued than it is conventionally. We definitely have an undervalued food supply. But at the same time, we need to have fair and just pricing for food, for both the farmer and the consumer. I think that's an area that is a weak spot in organics, is that there's a lot of it that's basically discretionary-income spending for people. I'd like to see more of that really meet the needs of poorer people.

This farm here has sacrificed income as a design. We keep our prices intentionally lower than the market, especially with our CSA and the farmers market. We are definitely under-pricing ourselves. And we are trying to serve people. So I think that's a big challenge for the future for organics, is keeping it in touch with the population base.

Rabkin: Do you see a way to make that happen?

Cantisano: Yes. I think a big chunk of it is getting—and I hate the word "efficiency," but organic farmers need to keep improving their efficiency, because that's where the economics of scale basically work in the favor of large-scale agriculture. If a farm can become more efficient, it can then make a profit at a lower margin. That's one area.

Then the effort of more direct marketing. As much as possible, people selling directly to consumers is really an important way to both keep the income up for

farmers and potentially reduce the price to consumers. I'm dismayed to see that farmers' markets now are typically higher than buying at the store. I think that's not a good sign. I don't know how that's going to survive the long-term economic cycle. That seems odd to me. Farmers' markets should be fair. People should get fair prices. That's all I can say. So we don't charge those kinds of prices at the markets. We're not going to be higher than the local natural food stores. We're just not going to do it. So, fair pricing.

The other part of that is getting more farmers involved in the business, both small and large, so that that increases the supply. And farmers finding their right scale, what really works for them on an economic basis. That's a challenging one because some people are really motivated to get bigger and bigger and bigger, and others probably should get bigger in order to make the economic thing really work.

Rabkin: Towards efficiency, for example?

Cantisano: Yes. If they're trying to charge five times the price of commercial produce because they haven't got the scale of the operation to pay the difference, something's wrong. That's not right. So they need to scale up, change crops, get bigger, whatever it takes. I'm not, again, a big advocate of getting bigger, but sometimes you have to say, "Okay, well, I grew 1,000 pounds of this, but actually if I grew 5,000 pounds of this, then I would actually do better economically and I wouldn't necessarily need so much per pound." Then that typically allows you

to get better pieces of equipment, and your scales of operation get more efficient. So that's a big challenge.

I think another big challenge is imported organic food. I think that that is going to continue to put pressure on California and other U.S. producers. I think consumers are still really unaware that the broccoli in Cascadian Farms' TV dinner tonight is from China. And it was being grown on my friend's farm in Salinas Valley five years ago. So that troubles me. That's a troubling sign, not the least of which is that the Chinese aren't notably reliable about their rules and regulations, in addition to the whole food-miles issue, and are they actually getting that money back in China, too, or is it just being held by a corporation in the middle of the deal? That's disconcerting to me. I'm really concerned about that.

What other kinds of trends trouble me? Well, the whole consolidation in the vegetable business is troubling. Reputedly, Earthbound has an eighty-percent market share in some crops now. That's nuts.

Rabkin: Nationwide.

Cantisano: Nationwide. That's nuts. That's not sustainable. I mean, they're really good marketers. I don't give them any flak for that, but they've actually crashed and burned some markets because they had so much product that they put in the ground that they had to sell it cheaper than anyone could afford to produce it, in order just to get some cash back out of it. That's not sustainable. That's not going to work in the long run. So we need some more competition in there, but I don't

know if anybody is going to rise to the surface, because a few people have tried to compete with them, and they don't seem to be able to.

And the resources are becoming much more expensive for the farmer. Inputs have gone up a lot. I just bought a bag of organic chicken feed, and we have, what, twenty chickens on the farm. But chicken feed is two and a half times higher than it was a year ago.

Rabkin: Wow.

Cantisano: Two and half times higher than it was a year ago! Now, that's partly because organics demand is strong, but it's also because this whole push towards ethanol production in corn acreage has pushed all corn and field crops up in price. Organics is getting pressured in that regard. So it's like, God. It made me think twice about buying the organic chicken feed. It's like, "[Makes sound of indecision]," you know. And sure, the conventional has gone up a lot, too, but nothing compared to that. And that's an issue. Everything is going up in price a lot. All of what used to be things that we used to just basically recycle are now valuable. I guess that's as it should be. We're no longer just throwing them away as waste products, but that does put some interesting economic challenges on the farm community.

And then the other challenge is just the aging population. (laughs) I'm a youngster in this, to some degree. They say the median age in agriculture in the U.S. is fifty-eight. I am fifty-seven. So what does that tell you? If we don't get some more young folks in it pretty quick, you're not going to have a whole lot

being produced here. So I'm encouraged to see the amount of interest by youth right now. And that's an opportunity. I think there *is* an opportunity. And that's another area. There need to be more educational farms. There needs to be more universities and colleges that are offering agriculture, hands-on teaching opportunities. There needs to be more like California FarmLink program, where they're getting mentors and land exchanges and those kinds of things going on. All that needs to happen, because we need more opportunities for farming.[46]

Water, clearly. It's going to be more of an issue every single year. We have to get more efficient at using water, learning a lot about that.

So there are a lot of opportunities, and there are a lot of challenges. Hey, most of the people in the U.S don't eat organic food. Ninety-eight percent of the land is not farmed organically. That's a huge opportunity. In 1980 I wrote an article predicting my version of the organic future. I thought that the majority of U.S. agriculture would be organic by 2000. I did it as a think piece. I was way wrong. Twenty years down the road, or now twenty-seven years past since I wrote that, we're still just inching forward. So I think that there is still a huge opportunity and challenge. If we're just the only sane thing in a sea of insanity, we're still insane, you know? We need to get more sanity into agriculture. And so that's a consuming issue. Consumers drive that whole thing. I talked to the head lady at Safeway, and Safeway is just blown away by how successful the organic line is. Blows their mind. They just had no idea it was going to be so successful.

Rabkin: So it's selling well.

Cantisano: It exceeded their sales expectations the first year by 108 percent. It hasn't stayed at that level, but it's just astounded them. They did not know that there was that much supermarket demand for organic. There's some produce, but their main selling items are the processed items. So that interests them to keep growing, so that's a trend. You're going to see more and more organic—whatever it is. But then I'm just reading—here's the organic Alvarado Street bakery guy saying, "Well, you know what? I had a contract for sprouting wheat this year, and the broker just broke the contract. They just went, 'No, we're not going to supply to you at that price anymore. Take it or leave it.'" And then said something like, "Well, if they raise the price about another fifteen percent, I'm going to have to go to commercial grain, because I can't afford this. I can't raise the price of my bread that high." So there's this competing set of dynamics going on right now. That'll be interesting, how that shakes out, where that goes.

What I thought was, well, great, let's get some more grain farmers in the deal. There's an opportunity here. But you got to transition that land, and that's going to take three years. I'm not convinced that three years is any magic number. It was a number pulled out of the hat by IFOAM [International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements] at one point, and everybody stuck with it. Nothing convinces me that things are pure at three years—that all of a sudden, wave the magic wand; now it's all clean. I don't know. I don't think there's a whole lot of difference between one year and three years, but that's what the law is now, so we live with it.

So that's kind of my thoughts on what's going on.

Rabkin: In light of all those challenges and opportunities, is there anything in particular that give you hope?

Cantisano: Yes, because there's some market growth constantly. There is way more companies in it now. CCOF just passed its half-millionth acre in certified acreage. There's a lot more processors in it. There are a lot more organic farmers than there ever was. A lot of them have increased in scale. More of them are becoming successful. There's this whole youth movement, which looks like if they could figure out where to land may, may be the next stage of it.

And society is getting wiser. I mean, I can see that in my parents' generation checking out at the local supermarket. Now they're no longer asking me, "What is organic?" Now they're going, "Oh, I buy organic every now and then, if it's a good value," or something. So I think that's a trend. People can taste the difference a lot of times, and that's an important prerequisite.

There's also a lot more people supplying organic inputs and doing research on organic than there ever was. It's incremental, but I do think that there's positive change afoot. I was pretty pessimistic there for a while, but I've gotten past that. I look at it now and go, it just takes longer than you think.

I read this book. I can't remember the name of it now, but it clued me in. It was an ag history book, and their point was how long things take to change in agriculture, and they were describing this county in Illinois that had got the first tractor, when the first tractor came to the county. It took twelve years until the second tractor was sold.

Rabkin: Interesting.

Cantisano: So you'd think a tractor is going to be a hit. Somebody went twelve years until the second one was sold. It was like, oh, okay, agriculture is a slow, conservative-by-nature kind of a thing. It doesn't change very fast. I was idealistic in 1980, saying it was going to change a lot. But it *has* changed a lot. It's just a slow thing to change. It's a big monolith, and turning a train around or a ship around takes a long time.

But I'm positive about it. I think there's a lot of hope. My grandson and I were out there digging up carrots the other day, and he was going, "Grandpa, look at all the earthworms." He knows a little bit about them now. And we were down there, and he's holding one. He said, "And these are what give the carrots their food." I've never said a word to him, so he got this obviously at school or something. So it's starting to trickle down. Bit by bit, change is taking place. I don't know if it's going to be fast enough to save the morass we're in, but it gives me hope. I'm ready to get up and go back to work, and feel like I can do something positive.

The other really good news is that, although we knew this, now it's being proven, that organics are more nutritious—they're better for the environment, they're better for the farm worker. There's this long list of now proven scientific things, which—I knew it, but, hey, I'm not a scientist. I can't go out and prove it. You just go, gosh, you put in better nutrition and you have to come out with

better nutrition on the other side. There's just no way that can be avoided. But to actually have scientists now validate that— That's really gratifying.

I think that's the tip of the iceberg. I suspect that they've done very little real research in it yet. And if somebody really gets into it seriously, you're probably going to see a lot more positive information about nutrition and biology and diversity and ecology and longer-term health issues with human beings. That's really encouraging. It means that maybe what we've done has actually set the table for a better way of farming.

And the other interesting—organic ideas are, even if these people aren't becoming certified organic, are moving into the conventional mainstream. I see cover crops where I never saw cover crops before. Compost sales are way higher than they've ever been, and they're not going just on organic farms; they're going on conventional farms.

IPM [Integrated Pest Management] is now politically hip. Planting a hedgerow is a good idea. These things are important. Again, they take a long time, but my friends that raise beneficial insects say they've never sold so many beneficial insects. So that's a trend to me that says the rest of agriculture is finally getting hip. Even if they don't become certified organic, they're going to reduce the amount of chemicals they use and have a more sustainable approach to farming.

Well, maybe that's as far as they go, but that's a step, and that was an improvement over where when I first started in this thing. Everyone thought we were crazy. Now that's no longer the issue. The ag mags actually have organic

sections in them now. I can remember there was nothing in there about organic farming for decades, and now they actually have a section on organics in them.

I think on the main, I'm positive and optimistic. It's just going to take another lifetime or two before things really completely change. I think someday we're going to look at conventional agriculture as, "that's how it used to be," and we're going to call organic farming "conventional," because it's the conventional way to do it. It's kind of interesting that that term even got used, because obviously until the fifties, that wasn't agriculture, either. Conventional agriculture was pretty much organic. So it's this kind of interesting switch in a fifty-year span. Now we're going back in the other direction. It takes a long time for that balance beam to shift fully. But it's shifting in the other direction. That's the good news. We're no longer slipping down the wrong slope agriculturally.

I don't think you can get a farmer today to stand up and defend chemicals anymore. I think you'd have a hard time finding someone who would say, "Yes, I know chemicals are really the right way to go." I think you'd have a hard time. At least publicly. They might say it in their circle of buddies, but it's not politically correct to say that stuff anymore.

Rabkin: Are you talking about California or the Midwest?

Cantisano: I think more and more throughout the country. Now, that doesn't mean they wouldn't use them or they wouldn't defend them and that they think they need them, but to get up and say, "Oh, I think this is a good idea," I think that is rare, a lot rarer than it used to be. I *know* it is. I know it is, because I hang

out in this politically conservative crowd, farmers. It's interesting; almost everyone I work with is a Republican. I have very few hip, liberal friends in the ag community. So you get to hang out with some pretty interesting folks, a lot of which have their circle of buddies that are all conventional. And they're the ones that give me this feedback, that they were sort of the social outcasts of the group. "Oh, that's so crazy to do that organic farming stuff," their friends would say, even though they were socially friends. Now that that's not happening. People are either asking them question about organics or at least they're not dissing them anymore. They're like, "Oh, wow! The organic thing. Well, it's your niche. You're in a different niche than I am, but at least you're not crazy."

So I sense that trend. Old habits die hard. Those guys that are in their seventies and eighties, no, they're not going to get out and wave the flag for organic tomorrow. But maybe in the guys in their fifties and sixties that are a little more open-minded. I've gone to these meetings. I don't hear them stand up and say, "Yes, chemicals are the way to go."

Now, GMOs, they're still hot for. They like those, because there hasn't been enough found wrong with them yet, to actually get them on the defensive about GMOs. But chemicals, there's been just so much press for so long about it. A lot of farmers are tired of getting beat up. I go to the Farm Bureau meeting, and they're the most reactionary chemical, nozzle heads in the state. And even they are calming down. They just realize they've got to find some common ground with these environmentalists, even though they hate it, that the environmentalists aren't going away. And they even have an organic

subcommittee now on the Farm Bureau. Like, oh, my God, that's a pretty big deal. They call it a market niche, and that's all they say, "Oh, it's just a market niche." But they no longer totally pooh-pooh it, so that's a positive thing. I'd say that that's a change. I mean, I got thrown out of Farm Bureau meetings in the eighties. You can see this huge change. That's a whole other story.

I'm going to write a book on some of this stuff some day. I got some good stories about things that happened.

Rabkin: I hope you do.

Cantisano: Yes, someday I'm going to do it. I've been threatening to sit down and do this kind of stuff.

Rabkin: Well, thank you so much, Amigo Bob.

Cantisano: You're welcome. I'm honored to be interviewed. I think it's really great that you're doing this and that you chose me.

Rabkin: Thank you very much.

Cantisano: My pleasure.

[1] The Juan Bautista de Anza Expedition brought approximately two hundred men, women, and children to establish a Spanish colony in northern California. This was the first non-indigenous civil settlement in California. Don Jose Joaquin Moraga was part of the lead team for the expedition, which left Tubac, in Sonora, Mexico (now part of Arizona) on October 23, 1775, arrived in Monterey after five months, and then continued under Moraga's command to San Francisco, where they founded the Presidio in June 1776.

[2]See http://www.wjasper.com/Moragahistory.html for more history on the Moraga family.

[3] The Haight-Ashbury is a district of San Francisco named for the intersection of Haight and Ashbury Streets near Golden Gate Park. The district is famous for its role as a center of the hippie movement, which swarmed "The Haight" during the Summer of Love in 1967.

[4] The Diggers were a radical community-action group of actors operating from 1966-68, based in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco. They took their name from the original Diggers in England in the 17th century, who had promulgated a vision of society free from private property, and all forms of buying and selling. During the mid and late 1960s, the San Francisco Diggers opened stores that provided free food, medical care, transport and temporary housing; they also organized free music concerts and works of political art.

[5] *Silent Spring* was published by biologist Rachel Carson in 1962. The book is widely credited with helping launch the environmental movement. *Silent Spring* facilitated the ban of the pesticide DDT in the United States in 1972.

[6] "'Food conspiracy' is a term that described various organizing efforts in the early 1970s among neighbors who pooled resources to purchase food directly from farmers and small distributors. In the San Francisco Bay Area, for instance, a collective of like-minded individuals would establish a phone list, create a list of available goods, members would volunteer for tasks such as taking phone orders and tallying the list on Friday evening, shopping at the farmers' market early Saturday morning and hosting the pick up spot in a basement or garage locally. There was also a quarterly dry-goods distribution. The produce was supplemented by eggs and dairy products from small distributors." See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Food_conspiracy

[7] See http://www.lundberg.com/farming/philosophy.aspx for more information on the philosophy and history of Lundberg Family Farms.

[8] See the interviews in this oral history series with Heidi Skolnik of Santa Cruz Trucking, and Ken Kimes of Santa Cruz Trucking.

[9] See the oral history with Melody Meyer (in this series) for more about United Natural Foods.

[10] Adrian J. Peters, *Green Manuring: Principles and Practice* (Agrobios, India, 2004).

[11] Edwin McLeod, *Feed the Soil* (Organic Ag. Research Institute, 1982).

[12] Acres U.S.A has been publishing for the past thirty-five years. "Based on the work of scientists and farmers whose sophisticated approach to agriculture reveals chemical farming as obsolete and misguided, *Acres U.S.A.* shows its readers how to embrace the science of nature." http://www.acresusa.com/magazines/magazine.htm

[13] See *The Albrecht Papers: Soil Fertility and Animal Health* (Acres USA 1975).

[14] See http://www.groworganic.com/default.html?welcome=T&theses=2866026 for Peaceful Valley Farm Supply's current website.

[15] See the oral history with Russel Wolter in this series.

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

[17] See the oral history with Melody Meyer in this series for more about Albert's Organics.

[18] Everett "Deke" Dietrick died on December 23, 2008 at age 88. See http://bugfarm.us/2009/01/22/everett-j-%E2%80%9Cdeke%E2%80%9D-dietrick-entomologist-1920-2008/ for more on his life.

[19] See the oral history with Jerry Thomas in this series.

[20] See the oral history with Zea Sonnabend in this series for later history of the Ecological Farming Association and the conference.

[21] Sally Fallon, *Nourishing Traditions: The Cookbook that Challenges Politically Correct Nutrition and the Diet Dictocrats* (National Book Network, 2003).

[22] Richard Merrill, ed. *Radical Agriculture* (HarperColophon 1976). See the oral history with Richard Merrill in this series.

[23] See http://www.eco-farm.org/ for more information about these events.

[24] See http://casfs.ucsc.edu/ for more information on the Farm and Garden apprenticeship program, as well as many of the oral histories in this series, including Beth Benjamin, Lyn Garling, Steve Kaffka, Steve Gliessman, Wendy Krupnik, Patricia Allen, Jim Leap, Orin Martin, and Jim Nelson.

[25] See oral histories with Janet and Grant Brians; and Betty Van Dyke in this series.

[26] See the oral history with Amy Courtney of Freewheelin' Farm in this series.

[27] *Ladies of the Land* was made by Megan Thompson. See the oral history with Lyn Garling in this series and http://www.ladiesofthelandmovie.com/

[28] *The Future of Food* directed by Deborah Koons Garcia (Lily Films 2004).

[29] See the oral history with Reggie Knox in this series for more on California FarmLink's agricultural lending programs.

[30] See the oral history with Betty Van Dyke in this series.

[31] See the oral history with Russel Wolter in this series.

[32] See www.fullbellyfarm.com.

[33] See the oral history with Jim Rider in this series.

[34] See the oral histories with Mark Lipson and Bob Scowcroft in this series for more on Alar Sunday.

[35] Russel Wolter participated in a panel on pioneers in organic farming at Eco-farm in 2008.

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

[37] See the oral history with Jim Nelson in this series.

[38] See the oral history with Jim Cochran in this series.

[39] See the oral history with Steve Gliessman for more on SAREP.

[40] See Alison Mitchell, "A Comparison of the Nutrient and Phytochemical Content of Organic and Conventional Tomatoes and Peppers," Organic Seed Alliance, January 11, 2006, Portland, Oregon. http://mitchell.ucdavis.edu/

[41] See the oral history with Mark Lipson in this series for an account of the Organic Food Productions Act of 1990.

[42] See the oral histories with Bob Scowcroft and Mark Lipson in this series for more on CCOF's history.

[43] See the oral history in this series with Roy Fuentes in this series.

[44] See the oral history with Andy Griffin in this series for more on Warren Weber.

[45] See oral history with Jim Cochran in this series.

[46] See the oral history with Reggie Knox in this series for more on California FarmLink.