

An Interview with
Wayne & Debbie Corse

at their home in
Charleston, Missouri

8 August 2013

interviewed by Jeff D. Corrigan



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PREFACE

Wayne Corse was born in Ironton, Missouri. Early in his life, he spent time in both Ironton and Saint Louis. After graduating high school in 1968, he enrolled at the University of Missouri-Columbia where he eventually earned a bachelor's degree in science and a master's degree in zoology. Debbie (DeLaney) Corse was born in Cairo, Illinois. She spent her early life in southeast Missouri on the family farm near Charleston. Her parents engaged in farming operations with her grandfather, Thad Snow, a noted agriculturalist and social activist. Her father, Robert DeLaney, was appointed to the Conservation Commission by Governor Warren Hearnes. After graduating high school in 1967, she enrolled at the University of Missouri-Columbia where she eventually earned a bachelor's degree in forestry, fisheries, and wildlife, and a master's degree in fisheries biology. In 1974, the Corses moved to Mississippi County to join a family farming operation near Charleston. Since that time, they have engaged in several agricultural practices involving no-till, reduced pesticides/herbicides, soil sampling, and non-GMO. In this interview, Wayne and Debbie Corse discuss their farming operations, the state of agri-business in southeast Missouri, and their views on current agricultural practices.

The interview was taped on a CompactFlash card, using a Marantz PMD-660 digital recorder and an audio-technica AT825 microphone placed on a tripod. There are periodic background sounds but the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures, certain vocal inflections such as imitation, and/or pauses are designated by a combination of italics and brackets [/]. Any use of parentheses () indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks [“”] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Em dashes [—] are used as a stylistic method to show a meaningful pause or an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech or when indicating a court case title. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [] indicates a proper title of a publication. The use of underlining and double question marks in parentheses [(??)] denotes unintelligible phrases. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Sean Rost.

Narrator: Wayne and Debbie Corse
Interviewer: Jeff Corrigan
Date: August 8, 2013
Transcribed by: Sean Rost

5

[Begin Interview.]

[Begin Track 26.]

10

Jeff Corrigan: This is Jeff Corrigan, oral historian for the State Historical Society of Missouri. And I'm in Charleston, Missouri, today, at the home of Wayne and Debbie Corse. Today's date is August 8, 2013. Wayne is going to be leaving us in a little bit, so we're going to ask him a few questions beforehand. Can you tell me when and where you were born?

15

Wayne Corse: Ironton, Missouri.

Corrigan: And where is that at?

20

Wayne Corse: Iron County. It's up in the hills past that Bollinger County that you were talking about. South of Saint Louis.

Corrigan: Okay. Did you have any siblings?

25

Wayne Corse: Oh, I certainly do. I have three brothers and a sister.

Corrigan: Where did you fall in line?

30

Wayne Corse: Middle. I'm the politician. (laughter) I'm the diplomat, if there is anybody in the family.

Corrigan: Okay. And what's your father's name?

35

Wayne Corse: Ralph William Corse, Junior.

Corrigan: And what was your mother's name?

Wayne Corse: Arlene Louise Hogue.

40

Corrigan: Is that H-O-U-G-E?

Wayne Corse: H-O-G-U-E.

45

Corrigan: G-U-E. And did I find this right, your father was a biology teacher?

Wayne Corse: He was.

Corrigan: Okay.

5 Wayne Corse: A biology teacher. A graduate of SEMO.¹ Maybe not called SEMO at the time, but, yes, he was a biology teacher. And that was probably for my reason in the scientific field.

Corrigan: Did your mother work?

10

Wayne Corse: No.

Corrigan: Okay. And did you grow up in—

15 Wayne Corse: Not until later on. After he died, she went to work in a factory in Bloomfield, Missouri. Garment factory in Bloomfield, Missouri.

Corrigan: Okay. And did you grow up in town, or in the country?

20 Wayne Corse: Really grew up in Saint Louis, Missouri. And didn't move to the rural, so-called rural areas, until I was in the seventh grade.

Corrigan: And where did you attend grade school and high school?

25 Wayne Corse: Ritenour School District. Saint Louis.

Corrigan: Okay. Where did you—I'm sorry—when did you graduate high school?

Wayne Corse: Nineteen sixty-eight.

30

Corrigan: And you both went to Mizzou² as undergrads, correct?

Debbie Corse: Uh-huh.

35 Corrigan: Okay. And you were—well, you studied herpetology, but what was the actual degree called back then?

Wayne Corse: I guess I have a master of arts in zoology.

40 Corrigan: Okay.

Wayne Corse: With an emphasis in herpetology.

Corrigan: Okay. And then when did—I'm sorry—what was your undergraduate degree in?

¹ Southeast Missouri State University.

² University of Missouri-Columbia.

Wayne Corse: Master of Arts in—

Debbie Corse: Bachelor of Arts

5

Wayne Corse: Bachelor of Arts in science.

Corrigan: Bachelor. Okay. And then—so I take it your father's occupation led you somewhat into science. Did you like it always?

10

Wayne Corse: Yes. We always had some sort of animal. A pet. Catching a frog, or a snake, or a salamander, or something like that.

Corrigan: Did you spend a lot of time outdoors as a kid?

15

Wayne Corse: Certainly did. As a matter of fact, all summer long. Over by the Black River outside of Piedmont, Missouri.

Corrigan: Okay. And what kind of activities did you do back then? I mean, did you hunt, and fish, and do things like that?

20

Wayne Corse: Hunted. Fished. We certainly had to work. Chop weeds, or whatever. Cut wood. We certainly had regular labors to do before we got to go swimming in the river.

25

Corrigan: Yeah.

Wayne Corse: Yeah.

Corrigan: Now, how was the river back then?

30

Wayne Corse: It was wonderful. You swam in the river with—we didn't have swimming shorts. There were so few people around that we just were naked.

Corrigan: Uh-huh. I mean, was the water clean?

35

Wayne Corse: It was clear. Now, it's below Clearwater Lake so it's not as clear as the upper part. But, no, it was clear, it was clean, and it was wonderful. Very fond memories of the river.

40

Corrigan: Now, you went into science, was science your favorite subject as say in high school?

45

Wayne Corse: Really I didn't have a subject in high school that you would call a particular kind of science. When I went to the University of Missouri, I had to—Lyndon Johnson put a lot of money into me to go to college. And I had a time-slip job, and I worked for a herpetologist. Doctor Dean Metter.

[End Track 26. Begin Track 27.]

Corrigan: Metter?

5

Wayne Corse: M-E-T-T-E-R. And, we were always going on field trips, or doing research projects on a particular salamander or something like that pretty regularly.

Corrigan: And is that how you got interested in herpetology?

10

Wayne Corse: Exactly.

Corrigan: Okay. And then—so he's probably the professor that sticks out in your mind the most.

15

Wayne Corse: Oh, certainly.

Corrigan: Okay. And is that what made you directly go into herpetology then after that? Or graduate school?

20

Wayne Corse: Yes. But after a while, you realize there's probably not a living in it.

Corrigan: And we can get back to this when you talk about, because when did you guys come—well, I guess, when did you guys meet? Was it in undergrad or graduate school?

25

Debbie Corse: We met in school.

Wayne Corse: I was an undergrad, and she was a senior, I guess. I was a junior. And we're in similar programs. And I guess eventually we were going to meet.

30

Corrigan: Now, when did you guys actually come back here and start farming?

Debbie Corse: Nineteen seventy-four.

35

Wayne Corse: Yes. Next summer it will be forty years ago. My wife has no brothers, and back then, it was always assumed that it was a male lineage type thing. They had almost three sons-in-law at the time. Kathy wasn't married yet. But, I guess the choice was between who was the most likely to carry on the farm into the future. And I guess we were chosen.

40

Debbie Corse: Well, we were trying to look for jobs after we got our degrees, master's degrees. And there weren't that many jobs, or we got tired of trying. And then my mom wanted my dad to retire. So, it just seemed like—back then prices were really good for grains so we just made the move.

45

Corrigan: So you transitioned right into—so just right after graduate school you came back and started farming.

Debbie Corse: Uh-huh.

Corrigan: So, before you have to leave, I want to talk about your farm a little bit.

5

Wayne Corse: Go ahead.

Corrigan: Can you describe to me the size, the scope, what you produce? Can you kind of lay it out for me a little?

10

Wayne Corse: Originally in 1974, there were at that time many—smaller farms were more numerous. And really, this was part of it. They owned a thousand acres, and we farmed roughly 800 of that with woods and ditches and highways making up the other part. And it was tough going for many, many years. And since then, with buying more land, and a partnership with Lester Goodin that you're going to speak with tomorrow, we have elevated to about 2400 acres right now. In addition to that, about five years, loving the Ozarks and clean water and things like that, we bought a 640 acre farm over in Wayne County. Outside of Sam A. Baker State Park. As a matter of fact, it borders, it's adjacent to the park. Sam A. Baker State Park.

20

Corrigan: So, you have 2400 [acres] that's tillable? Or is that total?

Wayne Corse: Yes. Tillable type acres. Somewhere around that.

25

Corrigan: Okay.

Wayne Corse: A lot of it's in these conservation—they're not in crops, necessarily, but they're in some type of conservation program. Grasslands. Filter strips. Things like that.

30

Corrigan: Now, you told me before, you do a lot of no-tilling.

Wayne Corse: We're all no-tilling.

Corrigan: Okay.

35

Wayne Corse: Except when the—sometimes falls are very wet and you rut up the ground with your combine. But other than that, we do have—our best example is right out here in front of our house. It's been twenty-two years without being tilled.

40

Corrigan: Okay. So this is not something you started recently.

Wayne Corse: No. No.

Corrigan: You've been no-tilling for quite a long time.

45

Wayne Corse: Yes.

Corrigan: Okay. Now, what are some of the other things you do? You mentioned filter strips. What are some of the other things you do with the environment in mind while you're farming?

5

Wayne Corse: I guess the basis of our thought is that things that we do on this farm— whether it's any type of pesticide, herbicide, fertilizer, that we expect that to not leave this farm. Or we try to greatly reduce the quantities that do leave. That is when water runs into the ditch, goes into a bigger ditch, and eventually the Mississippi River. We truly don't want it to add to the dead zone down in the Gulf of Mexico. We want to be the solutions, instead of the problem.

10

Corrigan: Now, I saw that you were a certified crop advisor.

15 Wayne Corse: Yes.

Corrigan: And that you are also a NRCS³ technical service provider. I guess that's called.

Wayne Corse: Yes.

20

Corrigan: And you guys practice what is commonly referred to as integrated pest—

[End Track 27. Begin Track 28.]

25 Corrigan: —management. Correct?

Wayne Corse: Yes.

Corrigan: Now, how do you approach, though? How do you actually decide to be able to reduce the amount of pesticides you spray, the amount of nitrogen you use, and how you apply it?

30

Wayne Corse: The secret to this, I think, is knowing the economic threshold of when you should spray or when you should pull the trigger to do something. And the University of Missouri Extension is very good in helping farmers realize when this happens. Rather than just spraying prophylactically to get rid of everything. Let's take a milo crop, sorghum crop. It needs to have a certain number of pests per head before you would consider spraying. And at a certain size. If they are already big and are going to transform, you wouldn't spray. Realizing that if you do spray, you are getting rid of a lot of beneficials. And in some way you're going to hurt your own lifestyle, you're going to hurt your own environment that you live in. We like being healthy ourselves.

35

40

Corrigan: Now, I saw that you soil sample.

45 Wayne Corse: Yes.

³ Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Corrigan: But you do it in a grid pattern. Is that correct?

5 Wayne Corse: That's correct. If you do it on two and a half acre grid, the samples on two and a half acres, one part of the field may be vastly different than another. That is, if it needs so much fertilizer here, it may not need it over there. So the fertilizer rigs are tuned in to apply just what's needed on that particular spot. Rather than just doing everything the same way, uniformly.

10 Corrigan: Are you familiar with what I would call soil sampling by management zones. That's not done on a grid. It kind of takes into account the topography, the soil, the different elevations and things.

15 Wayne Corse: I can't say that I'm familiar with that. And it might not be applicable here because we're pretty much zero [or] less than two percent grade everywhere. And our soils are reasonably uniform, not uniform, but, no, I can't say as a manager. That may apply more to the land over in the hills that we own, rather than here where you have hills that can erode and bottom lands that can be treated much differently.

20 Corrigan: Okay. I wasn't sure if it was because it's not necessarily readily—that practice isn't readily available down here or done yet, or if it's just not necessary.

Wayne Corse: Well, the NRCS basically set up these programs and these contracts, and at that time, that's what they were promoting. Two and a half acre grid sampling systems.

25 Corrigan: Because as I understand this process, what it does is since the applicators can distinguish when to turn on and off, that by GPS mapping the field and breaking down into zones, by any different types of variations in that exact field, because it already can distinguish when to turn it off and on by plugging it in to the GPS it just applies it again
30 whereas needed because isn't the entire whole point of it is that you reduce the amount of pesticides.

Wayne Corse: Yes.

35 Corrigan: But, also then, that reduces the cost.

Wayne Corse: The cost savings are tremendous, but as to the general public, I would think not having a phosphorus or a nitrogen fertilizer out there. And by the way, the two and a half
40 acre grid sampling that's exactly what you do with that. At times, the fertilizer rigs are off going through a particular—and then may turn on if that grid needs whatever nutrient that may be needed.

Corrigan: Okay. You guys have some things that would be in CSP⁴, or it sounds like you
45 guys take part in as much of it as possible to protect the farm.

⁴ Conservation Stewardship Program.

Debbie Corse: He signs up for everything that's offered.

Wayne Corse: There's three different groups at any government office. You have the FSA⁵, the NRCS, and then you have district SWCD. Soil and Water Conservation District. And we're involved in some project with every one of those.

Corrigan: Okay.

Wayne Corse: We believe it.

Corrigan: It sounds like it. Now, I'm curious to know, are you unique in this area? Or are there other farmers that do similar practices?

Wayne Corse: The CSP certainly—

[End Track 28. Begin Track 29.]

Wayne Corse: —a lot of—CSP is probably one of the better and more profitable farm programs that's ever come out. And several farmers got involved in that. But, we probably have obtained the moniker of being the conservation minded people, farmers, in the county.

Corrigan: Were you going to say something?

Debbie Corse: No.

Corrigan: Oh, okay. Now, because I'm wondering, so if I go to, as long as it's not your field, the next field, or the next farm, or the next farmer, are they practicing this type of stuff? Or are they just blanket spraying? They're not no-tilling. Is no-till common down here?

Wayne Corse: It's becoming more common. At first, people would stop by and say, "You're getting by awfully easy, aren't you." But it's becoming more and more. Now, the practice that probably bothers us the most is the burning.

Corrigan: Is this of the ditches?

Wayne Corse: No.

Corrigan: Was is this?

Wayne Corse: The crops. To get rid of residue. Wheat residue. Corn residue. It's a phenomena that is rather appalling to us. Because you did get rid of nutrients when you burn. And also, you get rid of the surface residue which allows any fertilizer to be leaked off. That is, if you grow a wheat crop, when the wheat matures, you combine the wheat, instead of planting in the stubble, you would burn the stubble, and then plant your soybeans.

⁵ Farm Service Agency.

Corrigan: I'm not familiar with that. Is that common practice down here?

Debbie Corse: Here. Here it is.

5 Wayne Corse: It's practiced on most of the acres here. A large majority of the acres. Now, in the last twenty years, corn stalk and corn residue burning started. That is, if you have a corn field like that out there, after you combine it, rather than plant the next crop into the residue, you would burn that corn stalk.

10 Corrigan: So not even trying to disk it, or—

Wayne Corse: Just burn it.

Corrigan: Just burn it. On larger scales?

15

Debbie Corse: Oh, yeah. There's fires all over the place.

Wayne Corse: That's the common. Come down in June during the fire season, or in September during the fire season, you'd think you lived in a war zone.

20

Corrigan: Because there's just more besides—

Wayne Corse: It's quick. It's easy. But it does deplete the soil of organic matter. And there is more possibility for nutrients to erode and get in the ditches.

25

Corrigan: Because without putting the organic matter back into the soil, you're going to have to apply more fertilizer, more nitrogen, correct—

Wayne Corse: It's almost like you're hydroponic growing. The soil is just there. It's not really a living structure for a lot of people. It's just something that you're going to put your seed in to.

30

Corrigan: Because I would assume, then, the cost to farm that way have to be—

35 Wayne Corse: Greater.

Corrigan: Much greater.

Wayne Corse: Greater. But, a farmer stopped by two days ago, and said about the spraying you were asking about, and said he puts down a fungicide every year on his corn and beans no matter what, and he puts down a pyrethroid on his soybeans without checking numbers of any populations of insect species out there. We don't do that. We really don't want to use the pesticide unless we have to.

40

45 Corrigan: Now—

Wayne Corse: We do have to live though. Keep that in mind. (laughter)

5 Corrigan: Yes. But I would think, though, by reducing the expenses you might have by only spraying when needed, only applying, not burning, put in organic, in the end, you have to be—the amount of savings you have and the amount of money you can make has to be much greater than somebody whose just kind of doing it blindly.

Wayne Corse: We think so. We don't have as much machinery because we don't till the soil. And our goal is—

10

Corrigan: Any?

Wayne Corse: No. We don't till it unless it gets rutted up.

15

Corrigan: And then do you have to hire somebody to do it?

Wayne Corse: No.

Debbie Corse: We don't do it. We just plant line and stubble.

20

Wayne Corse: We don't do it.

Corrigan: Okay.

25

Wayne Corse: This field has only been planted and harvested out here for twenty-two straight years.

Corrigan: No till.

30

Debbie Corse: No disk. No nothing.

Wayne Corse: Now, you may spray some herbicides on it. Or, you may put some type of nutrient on it, or whatever, but—

35

Corrigan: Only when necessary.

Wayne Corse: Yes. The soil hasn't been turned over. We love our earthworms.

40

Debbie Corse: And also as scientists, we understand economic thresholds. We might have a few bugs, but if it's not going to—you know.

Wayne Corse: Or a few wheat.

45

Debbie Corse: And we understand the quality of your soil. The organic—

[End Track 29. Begin Track 30.]

Debbie Corse: —matter we're interested in. Not that other people don't understand that, too, but it's pretty high on our list of things that we pay attention to.

5 Corrigan: And now, those that are burning, they're probably not no-tilling then. Or are they?

Wayne Corse: Sometimes you would burn your wheat stubble, and then no-till into the ash.

Corrigan: So they may not be turning theirs over also.

10

Wayne Corse: Yes.

Corrigan: Okay. I'm just very unfamiliar with the burning. I did not know about that. That is not practiced where I am from. Now, you have is it corn, soybeans, you mentioned, or I think I saw, sorghum.

15

Wayne Corse: Sorghum.

Corrigan: Okay. And wheat, you mentioned.

20

Wayne Corse: Wheat.

Corrigan: So are those the primary crops, then?

25

Wayne Corse: Yes. We're normal in that respect. As far as the crops we grow.

Corrigan: And is that—because when I think of the Bootheel, I think of two more crops. I think of—and I don't know how much they're planted anymore—but, I think of rice and cotton. Are those still big down here?

30

Wayne Corse: Not in this county so much. This is basic—Mississippi County has turned into a corn, beans, wheat county. South of here, and west of here, you would find cotton. Rice, over by Dexter, Missouri, a lot of it in Stoddard County. But the last cotton crop grown here was the year Debbie and I got married in 1971.

35

Corrigan: Okay. So, there was corn—I'm sorry—there was cotton prior that with your parents or your grandparents.

Debbie Corse: That's right.

40

Wayne Corse: Certainly in the sharecropper houses and all that along with it. And she'll tell you more later on.

Corrigan: Yeah. We can get in to that. But, no, go ahead with what you were going to say to make sure we do get it.

45

Wayne Corse: In 1948, when her father came to the farm, there were 115 people living on the 800 acres that was tillable. When we came to the farm that made a total of eight living here, counting Debbie's mom and dad. And right now, there's five living here because we just have a one year old grandson now. Our son and his wife live down the road.

5

Corrigan: On the corner?

Wayne Corse: Uh-huh.

10 Corrigan: And is that, as I understand from Frank, your original—

Debbie Corse: Our house was right there across from the shop. Our old house. I lived in it until I was seven.

15 Corrigan: Okay.

Wayne Corse: And Thad Snow's house from 1914 on.

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

20

Wayne Corse: His original house was over here on the swamp.

Corrigan: Okay.

25 Wayne Corse: Nineteen ten and nineteen eleven. He lived there.

Corrigan: Okay. But you primarily grew up on the corner down there, roughly?

Debbie Corse: Yes. Yes. Two different houses, but yes.

30

Corrigan: Okay. And now your son lives there.

Debbie Corse: Uh-huh.

35 Corrigan: Okay. One other thing I want to ask you about before you have to leave. Now, what about GMO's?

Wayne Corse: Basically, we are non-GMO. Basically.

40 Corrigan: Could you tell me what the basic part is?

Wayne Corse: Basically, well—

Corrigan: Is it certain crops?

45

Wayne Corse: We have Lester Goodin's land and Thompson Bend that floods all the time. Floods regularly. All the time is probably a terrible term. You can't get in there to spray the weeds, so we are now GMO out there. But here, and Lester's other farm south of here, we are non-GMO. It sort of fits in to our size farming operation. We get a premium for the corn and soybeans. A lot of customers like it, the non-GMO. Our global trading partners do, and we'll supply what they want if they pay for it.

Corrigan: Now, are we talking certified non-GMO? Or is it just—

Wayne Corse: No, it goes through an extensive testing process and you have to get—

Debbie Corse: They test every load when you deliver it.

Wayne Corse: —certificates to even—before you even present it at their warehouse or terminal or whatever.

Corrigan: So this is not going to the regular elevator where you might take your other corn and soybeans? Or is it?

Wayne Corse: No. This is going to a place that is set up to take non-GMO. Now, that same elevator may have another part of their operation that deals with GMO. But they will take non-GMO. Of course, you have to keep everything segregated. Segregation of the seeds is the key.

Corrigan: Okay. So, because as far as I understand, when most people say, "America can't be entirely non-GMO because the system is not set up to keep it separate." And your saying down here it can be done.

Wayne Corse: It is set up.

Corrigan: It is set up, and on a large scale.

Wayne Corse: But the reason for that is, our elevator, CGB, is owned by the Japanese. And they want that product in their country—

[End Track 30. Begin Track 31.]

Wayne Corse: —or they want it in a country next to theirs. So they set up facilities to handle that. Really, the consumer is driving this it seems to me. If the consumer wants non-GMO, [and] is willing to pay for it, they will get it then somehow, some way.

Corrigan: Now, is most of your crops taken directly to the river? Is it all by barge? Or is it rail, too? Is it trucks? Where do you primarily take your crops?

Wayne Corse: Okay. There is a combine in fields here. We have what's called grain buggies that fits in there. And we will hire a trucking company to take that across the river to the CGB terminal. Typically CGB, sometimes we go elsewhere.

5 Corrigan: You said over the river. Is it in Illinois?

Wayne Corse: Yes. It's at Mound City.

Debbie Corse: Mound City, Illinois.

10

Corrigan: Okay. Thank you. I'm trying to just hit the questions that you want him to answer, and then I have other stuff I can ask you to make sure we got it all down.

Wayne Corse: I hope he keeps you here all afternoon.

15

Debbie Corse: I don't know that much.

Wayne Corse: Tell him everything you know.

20

Corrigan: You will know plenty. Oh, I know what I want to ask you. I read that you—so for every forty acres you plant, you choose not to harvest a quarter of an acre.

Wayne Corse: Yes. That's part of the CSP program.

25

Corrigan: Okay. My question with that is—

Wayne Corse: A wonderful thing.

Corrigan: Is it random where that is placed? Or how does that work?

30

Wayne Corse: If you want to do a good job, you will do it randomly and vary your crops. You will leave some soybeans, some corn, some sorghum, so that the animals have places to feed whatever they want on different places. So they don't have to go a mile from over there to back over here to get behind the woods to get food.

35

Corrigan: And you rotate those quarter of an acre always?

Wayne Corse: Yes.

40

Debbie Corse: Yes.

Corrigan: So the next year—

Wayne Corse: We'll put some everywhere.

45

Corrigan: So then the next year, you just no-till right through it.

Wayne Corse: No-till through it.

5 Corrigan: Crop comes up again, and you just choose a different spot.

Wayne Corse: That's right.

Corrigan: Okay. So, it's not on any—or is it on a set?

10 Debbie Corse: No.

Corrigan: It's just completely random.

Wayne Corse: Yes. But we have maps every year where we leave it.

15 Debbie Corse: We measure it, and we know how many acres in each field. You're supposed to come up with the total acres for every farm.

Corrigan: Okay. And is that how you break everything down when you look at your farm. So, you look at them each differently. With 2600 acres, how many actual—

20 Wayne Corse: Twenty-four hundred.

Corrigan: Twenty-four hundred. How many physical farms are you talking about that aren't necessarily in the same section, or in the same—

25 Wayne Corse: I guess you're talking about four different entities.

Corrigan: So, fairly large tracts of land all together.

30 Wayne Corse: Yes.

Corrigan: Okay. That's what I was wondering.

35 Wayne Corse: No, we farm in three large parcels. Each one's five to six hundred, at least.

Corrigan: But the one we're on now is your family's original farm. Is that correct?

Debbie Corse: Yes.

40 Corrigan: So, this is what would be considered the Thad Snow farm? This section?

Wayne Corse: Yes.

45 Debbie Corse: It is. Yes.

Wayne Corse: And then we've bought three different pieces around it. Debbie and I have.

5 Corrigan: Okay. Do you think the farmers in the area, those that aren't practicing the way
you are—at some point, or have people started to take notice, or do you get regular
questions? I mean, I'm kind of wondering do people know that you're environmentalists, and
that you can reduce your cost and you can reduce all these different things. Or, is it kind of
an anomaly? Or is even places like MU Extension are they pushing this on other farmers, and
are they grabbing hold? It's kind of a big question, but I'm just kind of seeing where this
10 area—when you think of southeast Missouri, I mean, do people stop you and say, "Well, why
are you doing that?"

Wayne Corse: That's a tough question. I get very few questions because most farmers have
developed their style. Farmers are quite the individualists, and they've developed their own
15 farming style and they're really not going to change very much from what they're doing.
They will do the CSP programs, [and] a few other little programs, but, in general, they're the
same.

Corrigan: Now, what about younger generations coming in? For example, you have at least
20 one—

[End Track 31. Begin Track 32.]

Corrigan: —right here.

25 Debbie Corse: Our son farms with us.

Corrigan: Okay.

Wayne Corse: So he farms our way, and I suppose he will in the future.
30

Corrigan: So I wondered, though, with maybe others as their children go off to college
maybe—do you think they're addressing this kind of stuff more now. Say, if you were to go
to MU now.

35 Wayne Corse: I don't know. The saying is, "There's something in the water out here that
makes us different." That's the saying. From Thad Snow on down. There's something that
makes us different. That doesn't mind being different.

40 Corrigan: Now, do you guys do things—you're out here you're on a well system. I'm
assuming, right?

Wayne Corse: We used to be. Now we're on county—I mean, it comes from the city.

45 Corrigan: Oh, are you?

Wayne Corse: Yeah.

Corrigan: Okay.

Wayne Corse: Public Water District. Now. But for years, we were on a well.

5

Corrigan: Because I was wondering what the water quality is around here. You know, it's going to vary from—

Wayne Corse: In general, it's got nitrates in it.

10

Corrigan: Okay. That's what I was wondering.

Wayne Corse: Some areas higher than others.

15

Corrigan: Okay. And then, I think lastly for you, recently, the Birds Point levee was blown up to save Cairo, Illinois.

Wayne Corse: And western Kentucky, and a lot of other, you know.

20

Debbie Corse: It wasn't just Cairo they were saving. That's what a lot of people don't realize.

Corrigan: No, and I don't.

Wayne Corse: It might have saved our own levee, too. North of our town.

25

Corrigan: Oh. There's another levee?

Wayne Corse: Oh, the levee goes all the way from Commerce, Missouri. It might have kept the levee up here from blowing, from overtopping, also.

30

Corrigan: Okay. Was your land specifically impacted?

Wayne Corse: Uh-huh.

35

Corrigan: And about how much was that?

Wayne Corse: All of that. Oh.

Corrigan: That was flooded.

40

Debbie Corse: Five hundred and sixty acres.

Wayne Corse: That one entire farm. Five hundred and sixty acres.

45

Corrigan: Because there was some, is it 30,000 acres that were—it was a large swath of farm land.

Wayne Corse: Yes. Over one hundred.

Corrigan: Okay. And so, about 560, you said, was yours.

5

Wayne Corse: Yeah.

Corrigan: Now, you said something interesting before we started, and that's what I wanted to hit at quick, is that the news media reported that by letting the water in this just wrecked the farmland. And you said something slightly different.

10

Wayne Corse: It made it a lot better. Now, I'm not talking about everybody's. It did cut up a lot of farmers' property where it looked like a moonscape. But Lester Goodin's property, it became much better because it got very fertile sediment deposited on top of it. As Debbie said, we're no-tillers, and it caught the sediment and kept it right there. And the sediment is wonderful, and we haven't worked the dirt since then. And we're still reaping the benefits of catching that sediment.

15

Corrigan: So, in your instance, it was excellent. But, in other instances, it was bad.

20

Wayne Corse: It was horrible.

Corrigan: Okay. So that's not a—

25

Wayne Corse: Absolutely a catastrophic event for some people.

Corrigan: Okay. So that wasn't a misstatement. It was just not entirely true for the entire area.

30

Wayne Corse: Exactly.

Corrigan: Okay. And now, I think the last question—we'll start with you now. It was nice to meet you.

35

Wayne Corse: Good meeting you.

Corrigan: Okay. So, Wayne just had to leave us. Now, we're going to backtrack quite a bit and now talk about some of those questions I asked him early on. Now, can you tell me when and where you were born?

40

Debbie Corse: I was born in Cairo, Illinois in 1949.

Corrigan: And that's just twelve or fifteen miles east of here. Right?

45

Debbie Corse: It was the closest hospital, then. I think.

Corrigan: Okay. And how many siblings did you have?

Debbie Corse: I have two sisters.

5 Corrigan: And what are their names?

Debbie Corse: Lee.

Corrigan: Like L-E—

10

Debbie Corse: L-E-E. And Kathy. K-A-T-H-Y.

Corrigan: And what was your father's name?

15

Debbie Corse: Robert. Most people called him Bob.

Corrigan: And so, that was Robert Snow, right?

Debbie Corse: No. Robert DeLaney.

20

Corrigan: Oh. DeLaney.

Debbie Corse: Yeah. My mother is a Snow.

25

Corrigan: Oh. Your mother is a Snow. Okay. D-E-L-A-N-E-Y.

Debbie Corse: Yes. With a capital "L".

Corrigan: Oh. Okay.

30

Debbie Corse: It's important.

Corrigan: And then, your mother's name was?

35

Debbie Corse: Lena Frances Snow.

Corrigan: And now, your father, he was a farmer?

40

Debbie Corse: He was from east Tennessee. And they met, my parents met, at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. He didn't finish his last year of college. He went into the Air Force. And he flew transport planes in Alaska during the war. And then, after the war—

[End Track 32. Begin Track 33.]

45

Debbie Corse: —he flew for Delta Airlines. They lived in Atlanta. And then, they came back here in 1948. It was an unfortunate situation when they came back. But anyway, they came

back and he became a farmer. And he farmed with my grandfather for a while, and then he and a partner farmed by themselves.

5 Corrigan: And where is your mother from? She's from here, right?

Debbie Corse: Yeah. She was born here.

10 Corrigan: So, where we're at now, this was your parents' farm through your mother. And your grandfather was Thad Snow.

Debbie Corse: Right.

Corrigan: And what was your grandmother's name?

15 Debbie Corse: Lila Simpson. And my granddaughter's name is Lila, also.

Corrigan: How do you spell Lila?

20 Debbie Corse: L-I-L-A.

Corrigan: Oh, okay. Where was she from? Was she from the area?

Debbie Corse: Here. Yeah.

25 Corrigan: Okay. So, Lila was from here. And Thad was from here.

Debbie Corse: He was from Indiana. And he came back—did you ever read the book *From Missouri?*

30 Corrigan: Parts of it.

35 Debbie Corse: Okay. Well, the first of it explains how he sort of got run out of town for some reason that he doesn't really explain. They were sheep farmers in Indiana. So, he struck out on his own all up and down the Mississippi River looking for some place to buy. And he thought he was going to raise sheep. But when he came back to here, and tried to raise sheep, it wasn't suitable because of the pest, ticks, and all that. He decided to become a row crop farmer. And he said he never wanted to do anything else. He loved it so much, what he did.

40 Corrigan: Now, to make sure we get it on tape in case somebody doesn't cross reference this before. So we're talking about Thad Snow, your grandfather, who has a large collection at the State Historical Society of Missouri. It's actually, I think, officially in our Saint Louis branch. And, a lot of—he is well known here and elsewhere outside of here specifically for a lot of things around sharecropping, but also the sharecroppers strike at the time. Now, did you know him?

45 Debbie Corse: He died when I was five.

Corrigan: Okay.

5 Debbie Corse: But is a pretty large presence in my life because I heard about him so much.
Yeah.

Corrigan: Okay.

10 Debbie Corse: And I've read all his work, and stuff like that.

Corrigan: Okay. So do you remember him at all? Or no?

Debbie Corse: Yeah, I do.

15 Corrigan: Oh, you do.

20 Debbie Corse: I do. He was a little crabby when he got older. But, he had a lot—he was just a very brilliant man. Had a lot on his mind. And to let my dad farm on his own, he moved over to Van Buren and lived in a hotel when he wrote his book. And he would come back here often, but he moved over there. So, he wasn't with us all the time, but when he was here, he lived with us.

Corrigan: Okay. And it was your mother, and she had a sister, right?

25 Debbie Corse: She had two sisters.

Corrigan: Oh, two sisters.

30 Debbie Corse: Two sisters. Yeah. And she was the only living one.

Corrigan: When he passed away.

Debbie Corse: Yes.

35 Corrigan: How long ago—you just don't ever really hear much at least—you hear his name but not your grandmother's name. Did she—

Debbie Corse: She died when my mother was fifteen. I never knew her.

40 Corrigan: Okay.

Debbie Corse: Yeah. But all her siblings, several of her siblings, lived around here. And I had aunts and uncles from her Simpson family that I knew very well. So, yeah.

45 Corrigan: Okay. So she died when your mother was quite young.

Debbie Corse: Yes.

Corrigan: Which is probably why I don't really hear.

5 Debbie Corse: Yeah.

Corrigan: She died much earlier than Thad did. Okay. And so, now your mother—so it was really Thad's son-in-law that took up the farming. But you said he did farm with Thad.

10 Debbie Corse: They did.

Corrigan: They farmed together.

Debbie Corse: They did for a while. Yeah.

15

Corrigan: Because he wasn't a farmer by trade.

Debbie Corse: No. Neither was Wayne. (laughter)

20 Corrigan: That's true.

Debbie Corse: It's kind of weird.

25 Corrigan: I'll ask you about that a little bit later, too. That's a very good similarity. So you said, Lila—they met in Tennessee.

Debbie Corse: No. My mother, Frances, met my father, Bob, in Tennessee.

Corrigan: Okay.

30

Debbie Corse: When my grandfather came here, he had another wife. He was married. And she died. They had two children. Hal and Priscilla. And then, he met my grandmother and then married her. And they had two daughters. So he actually had four children. I never knew Priscilla. She died before I was born. And never knew Hal. And I never knew Emily. She died before I was born, too. So Mother was the only one left.

35

Corrigan: Emily was her sister, right?

Debbie Corse: Uh-huh.

40

Corrigan: Okay. But you did meet Thad, and knew him, at least a little bit.

Debbie Corse: Yeah. Yeah.

45 Corrigan: Okay. And so your parents farmed for many years, then.

Debbie Corse: From '48 to seventy—well, my dad didn't really retire until '74. So from '48 to '74.

Corrigan: Now, Thad—

5

[End Track 33. Begin Track 34.]

Corrigan: —had instilled in them, and the family. So this idea of you being environmentally minded and conservation is not something new.

10

Debbie Corse: No.

Corrigan: And so the practices that you and Wayne are talking about, or, for example, I mean people can't see this, but I know when I went by the property, there are lots of tree rows. It's not like some of the other farms very near here where you just see wide open tracks. And the trees here are very old.

15

Debbie Corse: They are very old. We have the only woods of this size, I guess, in the whole county. I'm not sure about that. But it's seventy-two acres woods. And my grandfather didn't cut it to farm it. My mom and dad didn't cut it to farm it. We're not going to. And our people won't do it, either, because we think it's important to have some woods. And not trying to make money off of it.

20

Corrigan: Because there was a lot woods down here. This was a lot of—

25

Debbie Corse: Oh, yeah. My grandfather cleared most of this with mules and people.

Corrigan: Because the Bootheel was mostly swamp.

30

Debbie Corse: Yes.

Corrigan: But so he started back then, but he left this section, you said seventy-two acres. And where is it at to where we are?

35

Debbie Corse: Right here behind the house. You came by it if you came from Cairo. This is it all in here.

Corrigan: Okay. So everything east of this farm.

40

Debbie Corse: Well, not everything. We have a farm on the other side of the woods. But, yeah.

Corrigan: Well, yeah. But between here and there, there's seventy-two acres that's really untouched.

45

Debbie Corse: When they had so many people living on the farm, you know, back when cotton was big and you had to have people. They cut out the hardwoods on the edges because they had to have firewood. So, it's not untouched. Also, my grandfather ran cattle in here which is pretty hard on woods. My dad had cattle, but he didn't run them in the woods. We
5 stopped that. So, yeah, it's not untouched.

Corrigan: But, as close as you could be in this area. Right?

Debbie Corse: Yeah. It's never been timbered by a commercial timber.
10

Corrigan: Okay. And you have no intention. You leave it as it is.

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

15 Corrigan: And I didn't ask Wayne, but he had said when he was a child, but does he hunt?

Debbie Corse: Both of us used to hunt, a lot. We don't so much anymore. But, yeah—

Corrigan: But you did.
20

Debbie Corse: We did. And we fish all the time. And we're outdoors people. I mean, we'd rather be outdoors than indoors.

Corrigan: Okay. Now, so this property has been in your family a long time. So, when we see
25 these long fence rows of trees and things, this is a longstanding family practice.

Debbie Corse: Uh-huh.

Corrigan: Do you have any idea why Thad, and then your parents and you—did you get any
30 inkling, whether from your parents about Thad, why he was environmentally conscious. Was there anything? Did he just like the environment? Because you would have had everybody around you not doing the same thing.

Debbie Corse: I just feel like we have a tradition of thinking of ourselves as land stewards. I
35 mean, this land is not ours, really. We're just passing it on to our next generations, hopefully, in as good of shape as we found it. And I think this is something that I've always felt, that my people felt, and that we feel, too.

Corrigan: Now, where did you attend grade school and high school?
40

Debbie Corse: At Charleston.

Corrigan: Okay. And then, what year did you graduate high school?

45 Debbie Corse: Sixty-seven. 1967.

Corrigan: So, you're one year younger—sorry.

Debbie Corse: I'm a month older.

5 Corrigan: A month older.

Debbie Corse: Thanks. (laughter)

10 Corrigan: Well, I just wanted to make sure I get it right. This is for history. Now, did you have—I didn't ask Wayne this—I kind of did. Did you have a favorite subject in high school?

Debbie Corse: Math. Yeah. I always liked math.

15 Corrigan: And did you have a favorite teacher in Charleston.

Debbie Corse: Warren Moss was one of them. Yeah. He was an English teacher.

Corrigan: I heard his name yesterday mentioned.

20 Debbie Corse: Really? I bet you did. I know from who, too. (laughter)

Corrigan: Because that came up in an interview yesterday. Now, were you involved in any types of activities in high school?

25 Debbie Corse: I was in the band. Girls didn't do sports much when I was in high school. Which is funny because when my mother was in high school in Charleston she played basketball. But by the time I got there, they didn't have any organized sports for women. But music, mainly music.

30 Corrigan: Did they have anything down here at the time like FFA or 4-H?

Debbie Corse: They had 4-H. We were not involved in that. And I don't really know why. We were in all the scouting programs, but yeah.

35 Corrigan: Were you a Girl Scout, then?

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

40 Corrigan: Now, did you—tell me how you got to Mizzou. You went—

[End Track 34. Begin Track 35.]

45 Debbie Corse: My best friend was already there. She had been there a year. And I just went there, too. My dad became a Conservation Commissioner. I don't know what year. But it was about the time I was going to college. And he was up in Jeff City a lot, and Columbia area. I don't know. He knew a lot of people up there so it was just a normal thing for me to do.

Corrigan: What was your undergraduate degree in?

5 Debbie Corse: My undergraduate degree was for the Ag Department. It was Forestry, Fisheries, and Wildlife. I don't know if they still have that or not. I think they do. But, anyway. That's what the degree was called.

Corrigan: Okay. Now, were there a lot of women—

10 Debbie Corse: No. When I started my master's degree, I was the first women that my professor had ever had as a master's student.

Corrigan: And that was in wildlife studies?

15 Debbie Corse: Fisheries Biology.

Corrigan: Okay. Now what about your undergraduate classes? Not your gen eds, and that. In your ag classes, were there very women, or no?

20 Debbie Corse: Not very many. There were some.

Corrigan: Some. Okay.

Debbie Corse: But not very many. Uh-uh.

25

Corrigan: Did you have a favorite course that you liked? Or still remember today?

Debbie Corse: I loved evolution and genetics. Yeah. And the limnology. Bob Campbell. He just recently died. But he was an excellent professor there.

30

Corrigan: So science classes.

Debbie Corse: Science. Yeah. I took all mammals. Bill Elder and Nina Elder. His wife is Aldo Leopold's daughter. She was a friend of mine there. Yeah. All the animal courses.

35

Corrigan: Would you have read the works of Aldo Leopold?

Debbie Corse: Sure. Yeah.

40 Corrigan: Okay. So you said you knew his—

Debbie Corse: Daughter.

45 Corrigan: Oh, daughter. Okay. You mentioned a few professors there, but did you have a favorite instructor? Undergrad or grad, it doesn't matter. Is there a professor?

Debbie Corse: Bob Campbell was one of the favorites. And Wayne spoke of Doctor Dean Metter. He taught the evolution course. He was an excellent teacher. Those two stick out.

5 Corrigan: Okay. Were you involved in any activities or clubs up at Mizzou?

Debbie Corse: No.

Corrigan: Okay.

10 Debbie Corse: I mean, not really. Uh-uh.

Corrigan: What's the one thing that sticks out in your mind, whatever it may be, when somebody says, "Oh, you got your undergraduate or graduate degree at Mizzou"? And you hear "Mizzou," what do you think of?

15

Debbie Corse: We loved Columbia. We really—both of us really liked Columbia.

Corrigan: So it's the town.

20 Debbie Corse: Yeah. I mean, and the liberal atmosphere, I'm sure.

Corrigan: But just the idea of a college town in general, and all that goes with it.

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

25

Corrigan: Okay. Did you have a job during school?

Debbie Corse: I was a TA.

30 Corrigan: In graduate school?

Debbie Corse: Well, I was a TA my senior year, too.

Corrigan: Okay.

35

Debbie Corse: In biology. Yeah.

Corrigan: And then, what year did you graduate?

40 Debbie Corse: I graduated in '71. And then my master's degree, I didn't really finish it until '75 because I had a baby in there.

Corrigan: So did you guys go directly into graduate school?

45 Debbie Corse: Yes.

Corrigan: Both of you. I mean, you are a year apart, but did you—

Debbie Corse: Yes. Just straight into it.

5 Corrigan: Okay. So no breaks in between or jobs in between. And did you tell me, when did you guys meet?

Debbie Corse: We got married in '71. We met in '71. We only knew each other seven months.

10

Corrigan: Okay.

Debbie Corse: So we met in '71.

15 Corrigan: Oh, when you were both in graduate school. Right?

Debbie Corse: Both seniors. Or I was a senior and he was a junior, I guess.

Corrigan: Okay. You started farming in '74. Is that what you had said?

20

Debbie Corse: Uh-huh.

Corrigan: Now, at what point—did you have inkling when you were in college, whether undergraduate or graduate, that you were going to go back home and be a farmer?

25

Debbie Corse: No. And Wayne didn't either. I mean, we were young. We didn't know any better. It looked like a good life. Which it is. And prices were really good back then. We thought, "We can do this." But, no, neither one [of us] did think we would be doing this.

30 Corrigan: Well, what did you think you were going to do? Or wanted to do?

Debbie Corse: We thought we were going to get a Ph.D. somewhere and be teachers somewhere.

35 Corrigan: Oh, okay.

Debbie Corse: And Wayne would have made an excellent teacher. I wouldn't have. But, that's what we thought we were going to do. But, we couldn't get in where we tried to get in. Or, we hadn't gotten word that we were getting in. So, we just decided to do this. We didn't own—

40

[End Track 35. Begin Track 36.]

Debbie Corse: —a permit.

45

Corrigan: Oh, you didn't.

Debbie Corse: I mean, when you're twenty-two years old, you don't know. Twenty-four years old.

5 Corrigan: Because you said you had—is it two sisters?

Debbie Corse: Uh-huh.

Corrigan: And they had no interest in farming?

10

Debbie Corse: No. And another interesting thing is too, when I was a kid, I mean, I would have loved to have worked on the farm. But my dad, I guess it was the time, and maybe him too, girls didn't do that. So we just played. We had horses. We just played most of the time. Now, I work every day that they're working. Just about. And I love it. But I didn't work until
15 my son was little. When he was small, one or two, I started taking him in the truck with me because we needed the help. But I didn't work until then. I had two daughters and then the son. But after that, I just kept working. And I really like it.

20 Corrigan: Okay. And then, your grandfather would have been gone, obviously, but your father, did he know—was he worried that maybe the farm wasn't going to be passed on in the sense of maybe property rights, but maybe not actually somebody working it? Or did he—

25 Debbie Corse: No. I don't think my dad worried about it. But my mom did. My mother knew that she wanted the farm to stay in the family, and I think it was in her mind. And she came to Columbia and said, "I want your dad to retire. We want to go fishing in Florida. Would you consider it?" And we were like, "Okay." But I think it was in her mind. But they were both delighted that we came back.

30 Corrigan: So your mother did kind of present it to you as an option.

Debbie Corse: She did.

Corrigan: Because it would have been—yeah, it came through your mother's side.

35 Debbie Corse: Right.

Corrigan: And then her father.

Debbie Corse: Uh-huh.

40

Corrigan: Okay. But you didn't think it was permanent necessarily at the beginning.

Debbie Corse: Well, I mean, we didn't think about it all.

45 Corrigan: In the long term.

Debbie Corse: We just did it. Yeah. We came and we rented. No. Wayne worked for my dad for three years. And then after that, he got out of it all together and we rented it from them. From Mom and Dad. Ourselves. And he was out of it. And when we started no-tilling, Daddy called it ugly farming. Because he would go to the coffee shop every day, and they were
5 making fun of it because it's—you know how when you till a field it looks so pretty and smells so good. Ours didn't look like that. You just planted right in the stubble. It's not as pretty. But he loved it after we started doing it because he could see the environmental impact of it, too.

10 Corrigan: So it was actually you and Wayne that introduced no-till.

Debbie Corse: Uh-huh.

15 Corrigan: Do you remember where that idea came from? To actually implement it and do it.

Debbie Corse: No. I mean, it was Wayne. I'm sure something he read.

Corrigan: Okay. Because nobody was practicing it around here.

20 Debbie Corse: No. Well, a lot of our problems back then were—it's so wet in the spring. Then you've got to get in there and work the dirt. Wait until it dries. Work it. And then work it again. And then plant. Well, to him, it just seemed like a great idea when it dries out just plant. I'm sure he read everything he could get his hands on about it. But, yeah. We went to a few—Milan, Tennessee has a no-till conference in the summer. We went to a couple of
25 those. But they no-till there to control soil erosion, mainly. We went to those and found out about the equipment that you need and all that. But it's perfect. Our dirt here is pretty heavy, and you don't want to pack it with a lot of equipment. You just want to make it loose. So, it's perfect for this dirt.

30 Corrigan: Would you say that you and Wayne approached farming scientifically?

Debbie Corse: Yes. I think it has a big part in why we like it so much. And, yes. Uh-huh.

35 Corrigan: So you said, for example, you mentioned [that] Wayne probably read about it. Are you two avid readers?

Debbie Corse: Oh, yeah. Yeah. We are.

40 Corrigan: Is there a particular area that you like to read in?

Debbie Corse: I'll read anything. I don't care what it's on.

Corrigan: Okay.

45 Debbie Corse: I mean, he reads—

Corrigan: Does that go outside of even—I mean instead of say a farming magazine. Do you read fiction?

5 Debbie Corse: I read fiction. I read history. I love historical fiction. We read the classics. My son had a minor in Latin. He reads. We all read. My mom read. We're big readers.

10 Corrigan: Okay. So if there was a question, is there a way that we can do this differently, so Wayne would have maybe turned to literature in some way to figure out. And I think he had mentioned, or you, you had turned to Extension. MU Extension.

Debbie Corse: I was just going to say. When we first came here, Wayne made a big point of meeting and using the Extension people. Meeting the county agent, and using them.

[End Track 36. Begin Track 37.]

15 Debbie Corse: We've been through probably four or five different agents we've been here. But we really use the Extension. We know the agent. We know his cell phone number. We can call him anytime, he comes out. We use it a lot. Yeah.

20 Corrigan: So is that—I'd say outside of the farming community probably not a lot of people know what MU Extension is, or what they do.

Debbie Corse: I think that's true.

25 Corrigan: As a farmer, how important is it?

Debbie Corse: It's important. Their publications are important. And just that ready access. Anthony Ohmes is our agent. He's from here.

30 Corrigan: Anthony Ohmes?

35 Debbie Corse: O-H-M-E-S. And if he doesn't know the answer to your question, he'll look it up. He'll get right back to you. He has so many resources in Extension that he can ask people. He'll do anything. If you have a fungus on the beans, you don't know what it is, he'll come out and look at it and help you figure out what it is and what you should do about it. If you are out in the middle of the field and you don't know what the economic threshold is of this certain kind of caterpillar, just call him up and he'll tell you. Yeah. It's very valuable.

40 Corrigan: Do you think that service is underused?

Debbie Corse: Yes. Some farmers are too proud. (laughter)

Corrigan: To ask for help.

45 Debbie Corse: Yeah.

Corrigan: Okay. Do you think that is an older generation thing? Or, no, does it stem down to just farmers in general?

5 Debbie Corse: It's like Wayne said, farmers are pretty individual type people. Individual people. Yeah.

Corrigan: Now, is that how—do you see yourself that way? Do you see yourself as very independent?

10 Debbie Corse: Yeah. Yeah. We do. We do. We don't feel the need to do what somebody else is doing. I also have to say we have a network of farmers that we talk to, that we farm near, or we see them. We share information, and they do too. We all share information. But, I think people are pretty independent.

15 Corrigan: Is this an informal group? Or is it—

Debbie Corse: Yeah. Just informal. I mean, you meet somebody out on the road and you ask them what kind of chemical they're putting down. Or how did it do last year. Things like that.

20 Corrigan: Is the community around here, the farmers, is it pretty friendly?

Debbie Corse: It's pretty friendly.

25 Corrigan: It sounds like the farms down here are quite large in comparison to other parts of Missouri where there's not big tracts of land. So there's a lot less farmers, I would—

Debbie Corse: There are. It goes down every year, I think.

30 Corrigan: So, there's a lot less of them, so therefore, fewer people are farming more and more. Is that a good way to say it?

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

35 Corrigan: So is that network shrinking, though? Or are other—you mentioned your son, he's into the farming now, too.

Debbie Corse: Uh-huh.

40 Corrigan: So it will get passed through your family.

Debbie Corse: Right.

Corrigan: Is that happening around you, too?

45 Debbie Corse: I think about that sometimes. There are a few young farmers that farms have come to them through their parents. But not a lot. I mean, I could probably name ten right

now. But, yeah, I don't see that happening. People go to college from around here [and] they don't come back. They don't come back. They find other jobs.

5 Corrigan: So this area is an exporter of people.

Debbie Corse: Yes.

Corrigan: Okay. And is that just because there are no jobs?

10 Debbie Corse: Yeah. It's either agriculture or teaching. That's about it.

Corrigan: Do they go far? Or it seems like areas maybe like Cape [Girardeau] are kind of a hub around here. If that's a good way to say it. A local hub.

15 Debbie Corse: Yeah.

Corrigan: I don't know if—we're pretty far south down here. Is there exports also to, I was going to say, Kentucky or Tennessee?

20 Debbie Corse: Yeah. Murray, Kentucky gets a lot of students. Yeah. I mean, they go far and wide.

Corrigan: Because you're closer to several other states, and other universities, than you are to the actual land grant university from the state you're in.

25 Debbie Corse: Right.

Corrigan: So, is there a loss of people, even a loss outside of Missouri. Are there people even going—

30 Debbie Corse: I think there were more when I was young. But now, like you say, it costs so much to go to school. Why go out of state.

35 Corrigan: Okay. I'm sure that disparity is probably getting a lot bigger. I'm kind of skipping ahead a little bit from some of the questions that Wayne answered. But I want to make sure I got them all here. Now, I read, I think it was in that—yes, in the Conservation Legacy Award that you—

[End Track 37. Begin Track 38.]

40 Corrigan: —guys had won. It said you had 170 acres of wetland forest. Is that correct? But I'm also wondering, what is wetland forest?

Debbie Corse: This.

45 Corrigan: Okay. So this—

Debbie Corse: We have this. And we have—I think 170 is too many.

Corrigan: Okay.

5

Debbie Corse: We have another woods over here. And another little skinny woods over here. I think 170 is too many.

Corrigan: But that's what we're talking about here.

10

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

Corrigan: Okay. The wetland is what threw me.

15

Debbie Corse: Right. Well, it's considered a wetland, and right now, of course, you can't clear wetlands anymore. We couldn't clear that if we wanted to because—

Corrigan: It's protected.

20

Debbie Corse: It's protected. Yeah.

Corrigan: Okay. Now, do you two—you had said originally you wanted Wayne to answer a lot of the farming questions. But do you two discuss and make decisions together?

25

Debbie Corse: Yeah. And my son now, too. So, yeah, it's just the three of us. That's all there is. We talk about everything.

Corrigan: Okay. And are you—does your son have that same, I guess, intuition or feeling of understanding what it is to be stewards of the land?

30

Debbie Corse: He does. Maybe, yeah, as much as we are. Yeah. He's very careful about—he does all the spraying for us, for instance, and he's very, very careful about washing out all the jugs. You know, triple rinsing everything. And disposing of it properly. And he even fusses at me, sometimes, about stuff I do that I've always done. But, yes, he knows about all that.

35

Corrigan: So it is the three of you.

Debbie Corse: It is. We don't hire anybody.

40

Corrigan: Yeah. He mentioned just trucking for crops.

45

Debbie Corse: We do hire trucking. We don't have trucks. We don't have anybody to drive them, unless we hired somebody. Another reason, I was just going to mention, this is just my opinion, but people that—big farmers like you say, there are a lot of big farms around here, much bigger than us, they hire people and they have to have people. So to keep them busy sometimes, they mow when they don't really need to mow. Or they work the dirt two or three

times. And it's just a—I mean, they come to work they have to find something for them to do. We don't have to do that. If we don't want to work one day, we don't work. It's only three of us.

5 Corrigan: Now, are you—the size, is that about the limit in which three people can do? Or do you think you can, if you even wanted to.

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

10 Corrigan: But I'm wondering, how do you strike the balance between the size of your farming operation and the fact that you do have just three people?

Debbie Corse: Well, none of our equipment is new. Some of it is pretty old. We take good care of it. Yes, we could buy bigger equipment and farm more ground with three people. But
15 right now we are using, how does Wayne put it, we're up to our equipment capacity as far as our ground goes.

Corrigan: Okay. That's what I was wondering at. Where's kind of the threshold. And you're
20 at it.

Debbie Corse: Right. We're at it. Which is good. Financially, it's really good to do that.

Corrigan: I just wondered like where does, you know, another farmer who maybe has twice
25 as much, you have to take into account if they have four hired hands, or something. And I wondered what you saw the threshold around here. So it's about where you're at.

Debbie Corse: Yeah. Right.

Corrigan: Okay. That answers it. Now, and I'm kind of vague on this, Doctor Nickell had
30 mentioned that you either do something along the lines of kind of conservation programs for kids. Or try to get kids—he was kind of vague on it, but he kind of was telling me about you try to expose children to conservation. Could you tell me how you do that, or what you do, or how you are able to do that?

Debbie Corse: Every year in May we have a Solar Day. It's Student Outdoor Learning
35 Activity—I can't remember the "R" now.⁶ We've had it for, I don't know, twenty-six or twenty-eight years. But anyway, the third and the fifth grade come out from Charleston schools for one whole day. And the school people organize it, mainly, but my mom and dad started doing it back when they lived down there. But I teach pond life. Wayne teaches
40 herpetology. And they—

Corrigan: You teach what?

Debbie Corse: Pond life.
45

⁶ Solar stands for Student Outdoor Learning Activities Retreat.

Corrigan: Oh, pond life. I thought you said pine, and I said, "I don't understand."

Debbie Corse: We do nets in the pond, and we do all the little critters and stuff.

5 Corrigan: And he teaches herpetology.

Debbie Corse: Uh-huh. He always has snakes and turtles to show. But we are only two of the probably fifteen different presenters that do something with these children. They have outdoor art. They do fishing. They—

10

[End Track 38. Begin Track 39.]

Debbie Corse: —do outdoor cooking. Somebody brings in some animal skins. They just have a lot of presenters that volunteer their time for that day to have these kids out here. And a lot of the kids have never seen a woods. They've never been walking in the grass. Never put a net in a pond. And it's, yeah, I think it's very important to keep doing that.

15

Corrigan: And they come out here?

20 Debbie Corse: My son's house, where my mom and dad lived, there's a huge backyard and the pond back there. And we have it down there.

Corrigan: Okay.

25 Debbie Corse: Yeah.

Corrigan: So it is on the farm, then.

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

30

Corrigan: Okay. So your parents started this, then?

Debbie Corse: Uh-huh/ Yeah.

35 Corrigan: Okay. Because your—Okay.

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

Corrigan: And you think this is the twenty-eighth—or twenty—

40

Debbie Corse: I think my daughter, Emily, was, I don't know, in third grade. Whenever that was. She's almost thirty-eight now. So, yeah, I think it's about maybe twenty-seven years.

Corrigan: And you said it's every May. So is it kind of an end of the school years thing?

45

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

Corrigan: And third and fifth graders?

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

5

Corrigan: So even though this is a rural community, there's a big difference, it sounds like, from kids who live in Charleston whose parents are not farmers. And even though they are surrounded by it, they have no idea or experienced it.

10

Debbie Corse: We have a pretty sizable underprivileged population in Charleston. I mean, a lot of the fields that used to work in the cotton, their families are still around here and there's not a lot for them to do. But yes, some of those kids have never been out in the woods.

Corrigan: Well, that has to be fun.

15

Debbie Corse: It is fun. It is fun.

Corrigan: But also educational. So you bring in other people then—or the school, I guess, does.

20

Debbie Corse: The school does it. Yeah. We coordinate with the school people. But, yeah, the school person brings in the other presenters.

Corrigan: And what kind of other things are they presenting on? Are these like an Extension person?

25

Debbie Corse: Extension. Anthony Ohmes comes and shows about water quality and erosion.

30

Corrigan: And what kind of art? Is there outdoor art?

Debbie Corse: They make little bird balls out of peanut butter and seeds for them to take home.

35

Corrigan: So to teach how to feed wildlife at home.

Debbie Corse: Uh-huh.

Corrigan: Okay.

40

Debbie Corse: There's another station that builds birdhouses. They do leaf art. They just print that on paper. Just a lot of different things. The kids love it.

Corrigan: And so this has to be, over the years, several thousand kids if you add it all up.

45

Debbie Corse: Oh, yeah.

Corrigan: Yeah.

5 Debbie Corse: The program was started through the Conservation Department. And they still participate. But a lot of them are just local volunteers.

Corrigan: Okay. So Solar Day.

10 Debbie Corse: You'll have to look it up.

Corrigan: That's okay. But Solar Day. I've got it down.

15 Debbie Corse: And Wayne also will talk. He gets asked to bring his snakes and turtles, if he has any on hand, to a lot of different places. Schools. And he just took one to the library a couple weeks ago. He loves doing that.

Corrigan: And he'll go—are these the ones that he just goes out and finds on the property?

20 Debbie Corse: Well, if he has to give a talk, we go find them.

Corrigan: Ahead of time.

Debbie Corse: Just walk around.

25 Corrigan: But you don't keep them as pets.

Debbie Corse: We have before. We had a little rattlesnake in here for about thirteen years.

30 Corrigan: Okay.

Debbie Corse: Yeah. A pygmy.

35 Corrigan: Okay. I guess Wayne kind of answered this question about incorporating other farmers in the area and what they do and why they do it or why they don't it. In 2008—actually that's where I got a lot of the information was your award you won, the Conservation Legacy Award, from the American Soybean Association. That kind of gave me a good breakdown of background on you guys. And that was a regional award?

40 Debbie Corse: Uh-huh.

45 Corrigan: Now, are there—my question with that is: Are you guys involved in or members of different agricultural organizations? And I'm thinking of, but you can let me know, but Conservation Federation, or even the Farm Bureau, or Extension. Or where do you go for information, too. Is it magazines, journals? Is it—I'm just kind of wondering, so obviously the American Soybean Association.

Debbie Corse: Right. We just get a lot—Wayne reads a lot of journals, farm journals, but we get our information from the Extension. And our good friend at NRCS, we get a lot from her. I don't know. Internet. We can look up anything on the internet anymore.

5 Corrigan: I came across this name: Swamp East Acres.

Debbie Corse: Uh-huh. My grandfather coined that phrase.

Corrigan: Could you tell me what—

10

Debbie Corse: Because it was a swamp.

[End Track 39. Begin Track 40.]

15 Corrigan: Is that what you've named your farm?

Debbie Corse: Well, this farm is named DeLaney Family Farm.

Corrigan: DeLaney Family Farm.

20

Debbie Corse: Because I'm in a partnership with my sisters. The three of us own the farm.

Corrigan: Okay.

25 Debbie Corse: But our managing partner is a corporation called Swamp East Acres Incorporated. So we just named it that.

Corrigan: But the name came from your grandfather, though?

30 Debbie Corse: Yeah. Uh-huh. Yeah. He did it.

Corrigan: It was an interesting name, and so—

Debbie Corse: It is. It is.

35

Corrigan: Swamp East Acres. And so that's why I wanted to ask. I assumed it was something to do with the business.

40 Debbie Corse: Yeah. And we're a Century Farm now. There's a sign on the road. And that's what it says, "Swamp East Acres. Century Farm."

45 Corrigan: Okay. Do people still—now Doctor Nickell had told me, he had said Snow's Corner or Thad Snow's Farm. And people understand and know that name a lot. But you called it the DeLaney Family Farm. And that was your—is it your mother or father's last name?

Debbie Corse: My father's.

Corrigan: Your father's. Okay.

5 Debbie Corse: Yeah. We called it that. Yeah.

Corrigan: Okay. Now, your sisters didn't take any interest in farming? Or did they?

Debbie Corse: I mean, they're very happy that we're here to do it. That we're in the family.

10

Corrigan: Okay. What kind of careers did they go in to?

Debbie Corse: And they love the outdoors. Well, my older sister she's a counselor. Well, she's retired now. And then my younger she just worked for an insurance company. But her husband worked for the Conservation Department, and he's retired now.

15

Corrigan: And your father was a Conservation Commissioner, correct?

Debbie Corse: Yes.

20

Corrigan: And that just doesn't come up without being a steward of the land, and that.

Debbie Corse: No. He just loved it. He was a friend of [Governor] Warren Hearnes. And Warren Hearnes appointed him to the Commission and he just loved it.

25

Corrigan: Now, are you guys involved with the Conservation Federation at all?

Debbie Corse: No. We've been to a couple of meetings. But, no.

30

Corrigan: Okay.

Debbie Corse: We have the farm over there in the hills he told you about. We have this. And we're pretty busy just keeping all that together.

35

Corrigan: Yeah.

Debbie Corse: We used to volunteer a lot more than we do now. Or do things like that more than we do now. But we're so—

40

Corrigan: You're busy.

Debbie Corse: Yeah. We're busy.

45

Corrigan: That's okay. So thinking of Missouri as a conservation state, and it's often called that. It is the pioneer in conservation. At least from your perspective here, what areas, if you had to think generally, do you think Missouri is, you know what, we're spot on in this in the

environment. On the flip side of this, though, you're in this area, where does Missouri need to improve on in regards to the environment as you see it? Not just yourself, but as a state, as legislators, as the Conservation Department. Are there areas that—again, it could be soil erosion, water quality, fish. I'm just wondering, in your opinion, what do you think is, we've got this down pretty well, but I'd really like to see a push in this area.

Debbie Corse: I mean, close to home, in the farming, is, I just think what Wayne was talking about, about indiscriminately spraying pesticides, herbicides. Not indiscriminately, that's not the right word. And fertilizer, over use of fertilizer. I think that's a huge thing. It's huge. We try not to do that. And that's another thing the no-till is good for. When you plant a legumes crop, and then you come back the next year and have a corn crop, you get carbon credits or you get fertilizer credits for your legumes being there. So you don't have to put down as much fertilizer. I don't think a lot of people realize that. They have—

Corrigan: That nitrification process?

Debbie Corse: Yeah. So we always subtract some of whatever is recommended how much we fertilize. We subtract some because we figure we get some credits. I don't know. And also, we don't feel like that we have to have a totally clean field. If you have some weeds that means you're not spending too much money. Or you're not putting down too much herbicide.

Corrigan: So is the overall effect of that—is it water quality?

Debbie Corse: Water quality. Yeah.

Corrigan: So, if you had to break that down, what you're discussing, is the overuse of chemicals and fertilizers, and you're not far from the Mississippi [River]. So you see it. That run off.

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

Corrigan: And then your husband, I don't know if he said that on tape or not, but talked about the dead zone in the Gulf [of Mexico]. Is that really kind of where you see the biggest problem is in the end result is water quality?

Debbie Corse: Yes. Uh-huh.

Corrigan: As it travels down. And do you think that has a cumulative effect on, not just the health of fish, but also the health of people?

Debbie Corse: Oh, I do think so. Yeah. I do think so. I mean, it's been shown—

[End Track 40. Begin Track 41.]

Debbie Corse: —cancer rates around the Mississippi River are pretty high. So, yeah, I do think so.

Corrigan: Okay. And kind of talk a little bit about, so you said you guys were married in 19—

5 Debbie Corse: Seventy-one.

Corrigan: And I know you have one son. Is it Hamil?

Debbie Corse: Uh-huh.

10

Corrigan: And he's Hamil Snow. Is that right?

Debbie Corse: Uh-huh.

15 Corrigan: Okay. How many children do you have?

Debbie Corse: Three.

Corrigan: What are the other ones' names? And where do they fall in order?

20

Debbie Corse: Emily. She's first.

Corrigan: That's your oldest. Okay.

25 Debbie Corse: She works at MD Anderson in Texas now. But, anyway, she just moved. Abatha. A-B-A-T-H-A. And that's it.

Corrigan: And your son is the youngest?

30 Debbie Corse: Uh-huh.

Corrigan: Oh, okay. So he's actually third. When I was doing research, I came across his wedding announcement. And that's where I pulled a bunch of the information from. That's the great thing about newspapers, they give a lot of information.

35

Debbie Corse: Well, he kind of came back here on a whim, too. I don't know if he ever really seriously thought about farming. But he went to school at the University of Wisconsin. And he was already out a couple of years just working a day job up there. And we got in a bind one fall, and we just called him and we had talked about it, and said, "Are you serious about wanting to come back to farming?" He said, "I don't know." I said, "Well, could you come back in three weeks?" He said, "Okay." So here he was.

40

Corrigan: What's his degree in?

45 Debbie Corse: His degree is in English.

Corrigan: Okay. And you had mentioned—what did you say English and did you say something about—

Debbie Corse: He loves Latin.

5

Corrigan: Oh, Latin. That was it. So another person who went into a different area but fell into farming.

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

10

Corrigan: So the intention is—does he love farming?

Debbie Corse: He loves it. Yeah. He loves.

15

Corrigan: How long ago are we talking about has he been a part of your operation?

Debbie Corse: He's been a partner for—he's been here six years. But he's been a partner for three years.

20

Corrigan: So fairly new.

Debbie Corse: Yeah. And we intend to retire after one more year, and then he'll take it over. He'll take all of it over. We're going to retire. We have cows over on that other farm, we have to go over there and take care of them. But, it's time. It's time for us to retire.

25

Corrigan: So the two of you are going to retire, and then he's going to take it over.

Debbie Corse: Uh-huh.

30

Corrigan: Okay. Now is that threshold—is he—

Debbie Corse: He's ready.

Corrigan: No. But, can he—no, I mean—

35

Debbie Corse: I don't know.

Corrigan: Size-wise.

40

Debbie Corse: We don't know. We try not to bug him about it too much. But he'll figure it out.

Corrigan: Okay. I was going to say you just told me that three was ideal for this size.

45

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

Corrigan: But, you said some of this land is in cooperation with Lester. Is that correct?

Debbie Corse: Well, yeah. But we farm his farms. We still farm all of it all by ourselves.

5 Corrigan: Okay.

Debbie Corse: Lester was a partner and helped us until—this is the second year he's been out of it.

10 Corrigan: So he's out of farming.

Debbie Corse: He's just our landlord on these two farms at Anniston and at the river.

Corrigan: Got you. But he used to farm.

15

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

Corrigan: I mean, I'm going to find more out about him tomorrow.

20 Debbie Corse: Yeah. You'll find more out. Yeah.

Corrigan: This can give me a little precursor, though. Okay. Now, and this is kind of getting off topic with the environment a little bit, did you know—so I knew after Frank Nickell told me who you were—did you parents ever talk about, or did the family ever talk about, or
25 community—so your grandfather's collection, or just who he was, was he spoken about a lot? Just because I think you—

Debbie Corse: Yeah. And sometimes not in a very nice way, too.

30 Corrigan: Well, how so?

Debbie Corse: Well, a lot of people thought he was a socialist. And he was really good to his people that lived here. He wasn't a southern gentleman. He was different. Yeah. But, he was a big presence. Like I said, my mom just admired him so much, and talk about him all the
35 time. And she was like him. So yeah, I mean, he was talked about a lot. Everybody around here knows—well not the younger people.

Corrigan: Yeah.

40 Debbie Corse: But my generation and older know who he was.

Corrigan: You're right. I guess it is mentioned that people thought he was a socialist. But you don't think he was.

45 Debbie Corse: I don't really know. He was very socially conscious.

Corrigan: Is there a way that—you mentioned the tenants, the sharecroppers, so he would treat them better?

Debbie Corse: He did treat them better. He was looked, for that—

5

Corrigan: Was it that? Others looking upon him. How he was treating—is that where you think the distinction came with—

Debbie Corse: Yes. Uh-huh.

10

[End Track 41. Begin Track 42.]

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

15

Corrigan: You don't need to do that, or you shouldn't do that.

Debbie Corse: And making the rest of us look bad. Right. I do think—

Corrigan: Okay. That's where you're thinking it stems from. Some of it.

20

Debbie Corse: Yeah. Yeah I do.

Corrigan: Because you seemed a little bit surprised earlier when I said that that was a very popular collection at the Historical Society. I don't know. Did it surprise you? You seemed a little bit—

25

Debbie Corse: Yeah, I am. I mean, I'm trying to think who these people are that are going to read that.

30

Corrigan: After all these years.

Debbie Corse: Yeah, I really am.

Corrigan: Okay. I was curious. You kind of perked up when I originally told, I'm like, "Oh, I get questions about your grandfather's collection all the time."

35

Debbie Corse: Yeah. I'm just very surprised.

Corrigan: From all over the world. Well, it stems from the sharecropper's strike which really does have world-wide—

40

Debbie Corse: That's true.

Corrigan: People understand it. And it happened here in Missouri. And it is an important part of Missouri's history.

45

Debbie Corse: Yes, it is.

Corrigan: And I don't know whether, for example, when it's outside of America whether it's the same kind of ideas of—I mean, things like sharecropping still exist.

5

Debbie Corse: Oh, I know.

Corrigan: And I don't know if that's how people look at it. I don't exactly know. But, I just wanted to bring that up a little because you seemed a little bit surprised—because it's been there a long time.

10

Debbie Corse: Right.

Corrigan: It's been there for many, many—well before I ever got there to the Historical Society.

15

Debbie Corse: Yeah. When we moved back here, I went in the attic at Mother's house. I didn't have a job. I didn't have kids. That was going to be my project to sort out all those papers. I mean, they were just in boxes and boxes, and not really in any order. And I realized that it was just too much for me. And then, I think by chance, they contacted Mother about donating his papers, and I'm like, "Come get them." I knew that something should be done with it, but I didn't know—I realized I couldn't do it.

20

Corrigan: Okay. So that was your mother that, I guess, donated them.

25

Debbie Corse: Yeah. She did. Well, she asked us what we thought. And we thought it was a good idea.

Corrigan: Well, they're being preserved and used.

30

Debbie Corse: I'm so glad. Yeah.

Corrigan: Okay. I was just curious about how much you knew or were involved with that.

35

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

Corrigan: So, you could have had the task of going through that.

Debbie Corse: I could've had it. Yeah. (laughter)

40

Corrigan: But you chose not to.

Debbie Corse: Oh, I wasn't smart enough to sort through it all. Or to figure out what was what. Professionals needed to do it.

45

Corrigan: Yeah. I mean, there were archivists that went through it. It's organized, and there's a wonderful collection of inventory.

Debbie Corse: I'm going to come see it the next time I'm in Columbia.

5

Corrigan: I actually think it's housed in the Saint Louis branch.

Debbie Corse: Oh, that's true.

10 Corrigan: Although, I honestly think most of their collections are housed in the Columbia warehouse so it probably is there. But if you come, you should let us know ahead of time. But you can at least see the inventory and everything online. And kind of refresh your mind of what might be in there.

15 Debbie Corse: Right.

Corrigan: And there's a wide variety of things. And in the future, you can always probably add to it, too.

20 Debbie Corse: Right.

Corrigan: Because it's still part of the family's history.

Debbie Corse: Right. Yeah.

25

Corrigan: And share that with your children and grandchildren.

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

30 Corrigan: I guess we should say that, too. You said, somewhere along the line, you have a grandchild. A new one.

Debbie Corse: Uh-huh. He's a year old.

35 Corrigan: Oh, well that's new. Is that your only grandchild right now?

Debbie Corse: No, we have four.

Corrigan: Oh, you have four.

40

Debbie Corse: Yeah. Two live in Saint Louis—or Maplewood. And then one in Texas. And then the one down the road.

Corrigan: So the one down the road is the newest one.

45

Debbie Corse: Right.

Corrigan: Okay. Alright. So you have several. So that should keep you busy, too.

Debbie Corse: Oh, yeah. That's another thing. That keeps me busy.

5

Corrigan: So, you're going to retire soon. How do you plan on spending your retirement? And what are you going to do differently with all this extra time you may have?

Debbie Corse: We're not going to have any extra time. Wayne's always—he's a very active person. He always has to have a project. So now we have cows over there.

10

Corrigan: Oh, yeah. You mentioned—we never covered that at all.

Debbie Corse: Yeah. We've done a lot of environmental things over there. A lot.

15

Corrigan: Okay. I actually never saw anything about cattle, so how many cattle do you have?

Debbie Corse: I think we have thirty-five females now. Maybe. I'm just guessing these numbers, but there close.

20

Corrigan: That's okay.

Debbie Corse: Maybe fourteen young. Two bulls.

25

Corrigan: And where are they located?

Debbie Corse: Wayne County.

Corrigan: And where's that at from here?

30

Debbie Corse: That is north of Poplar Bluff.

Corrigan: So how far does that actually take you to get—

35

Debbie Corse: About an hour—it's about one hundred miles.

Corrigan: So, is someone caring for them?

Debbie Corse: While we're not there, we have a man that comes and just checks on them. Yeah.

40

Corrigan: Okay.

Debbie Corse: We have spent the last five years, we bought it five years ago, putting up fencing. We've fenced out all the creeks and streams. We fenced out all the woods. And we did foresting improvement. What else have we done?

45

Corrigan: How big is the property?

Debbie Corse: Six hundred and sixty acres.

5

Corrigan: Oh, that's the acres he was talking about.

[End Track 42. Begin Track 43.]

10 Debbie Corse: Yeah. And with the government's help all these projects are cost-shared. Like
I said, we applied for everything. And got most of it. So, that's another thing we've really
done for water quality is to get those cows out of those creeks. We have big buffer zones.
Tree screens. Fifty feet of trees on each side of the creeks. We planted 14,000 trees. So, it's a
15 big—it's really improved the property. We've planted grasses. We've planted a lot of the
wormseeds and grasses.

Corrigan: Now, what breed of cattle do you have?

Debbie Corse: They're Angus.

20

Corrigan: Angus. Okay.

Debbie Corse: And we know nothing about cows. We're just doing this.

25 Corrigan: Is this a new venture?

Debbie Corse: This is new.

Corrigan: So just five years ago you decided to get into the cattle business?

30

Debbie Corse: I guess. Yeah. I don't know. I should have said no from the very beginning.
No, I'm just kidding.

Corrigan: That's okay. But up until that point, though, did anybody—your parents, you
35 mentioned some horses, but did you guys—

Debbie Corse: My grandfather and my father had cows.

Corrigan: Oh, they did.

40

Debbie Corse: Yeah. For a while.

Corrigan: Oh, that's right. You said they were in the—at some point your grandfather ran
45 them into the timber.

Debbie Corse: They let him do it. When we came back, we still had a pasture up here on the highway and we had a few cows. And Wayne convinced my dad that we'd make more money if we put that in row crop. And that's the last we had the cows.

5 Corrigan: Okay. So this is a new venture.

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

Corrigan: So that will keep you busy.

10

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

Corrigan: So you're implementing the same things. Same kind of things. Instead of pesticide run-off, it's manure into the water streams.

15

Debbie Corse: Which is a big cause of the dead zone.

Corrigan: Uh-huh. Well, livestock in general.

20 Debbie Corse: Livestock in general. Yeah.

Corrigan: Or large feedlots or CAFO's.⁷

Debbie Corse: That's true.

25

Corrigan: Yeah. So, how was the farm when you received it?

Debbie Corse: Terrible.

30 Corrigan: I was going to say, if you had to give it an environmental letter—

Debbie Corse: It was terrible. I did not like it at all. Did not like going over there. I just could not stand, being a fisheries biologist, I could not stand the cows using the creek as their bathroom. I just did not like it. And once we started doing some things—we put up the fencing first. And then, of course, we had to out in waterers for every field because the cows still had to get water. So, once we started improving it, I like it a lot now. It's beautiful. It's a beautiful area. I think our whole—when Doctor Nickell brought his group done last year, some of them were saying, "Well, why do you even use chemicals at all? Why do you pesticides at all? Herbicides." I said, "Well, we still want to make a living. We're doing everything we can to make a living, but also make it in a way that does not hurt the area."

35

40

Corrigan: And that's kind of an overall question that I hope I've kind of pulled out today was can large-scale farmers—so I'd say anybody over 1000 acres—can you farm sustainably using environmental practices that are both beneficial to the environment and the farmer, and

⁷ Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation.

still make a living, and a decent living? That the arguments against doing that are irrelevant or just not true.

5 Debbie Corse: That's what I think. I mean, I think you can. We've made a good living. And we've got a good lifestyle, for sure. So, yeah, I think you can.

10 Corrigan: So the idea that you can't be big. Or the idea out there that big—there's no option except to be whatever you want to call it—a bad farmer, or not an environmentally conscious farmer—is just not true.

Debbie Corse: I don't think it's true. I don't think it's true.

15 Corrigan: As we go on, I mean we have lots of problems right now in the environment, that's true, do you think more farmers are going to be, if not voluntarily forced into implementing—do you think we're getting to that point? Like sooner or later.

20 Debbie Corse: I think they are. Well, if Congress could ever get its act together and get a new farm program—I think when you do have a new farm program you're going to have, yes, more things you have to do to get certain money from the government. You're going to have to do them. I think.

25 Corrigan: Because do you see—the farm bill is usually seen on the one side of Congress, and then you have maybe the EPA [and] fish and wildlife on the other side. Is that a problem? Do you think that they are separate and might not be, should be, or how do you see that? Because a lot of people look at Congress, or the EPA, as "Regulations. Regulations. Bad for Business. Bad for our economy."

[End Track 43. Begin Track 44.]

30 Corrigan: You hear it bad for Missouri. You hear it bad for—is that how you see things?

Debbie Corse: No.

35 Corrigan: Do you see the Environmental Protection Agency as the enemy?

Debbie Corse: No, not at all. No. Uh-huh.

Corrigan: But you see other people think that's the case, though.

40 Debbie Corse: I certainly do. And they don't want to be in some of the farm programs because they don't want the government in their business. For all these things we do around here, we can be audited at any time. People can get out of their cars and walk on our land and see if we've planted these trees or if we've planted this grass or we've capped this well. And a lot of people don't want the government on their farm. And so, until they have to, they won't
45 be a part of the program that allows the government to come and check you and make sure you're doing what you're getting paid for.

Corrigan: And do you think that's where it kind of boils down to is the fierce, independent farmer does not want any regulation?

5 Debbie Corse: Yeah. I think that's right.

Corrigan: But does the fierce, independent farmer—then the idea is if they can do it better than Congress, or the government, that idea of big government, you know, can it be done without regulation?

10

Debbie Corse: Yeah. I don't know.

Corrigan: I mean, there's kind of a Catch-22 there, right?

15 Debbie Corse: Yeah. There is. There is.

Corrigan: But you don't see the EPA [or] US Fish and Wildlife—you don't see any of those as the enemy to you as a farmer?

20 Debbie Corse: No, not at all. Uh-huh. No. I don't think so. I mean, the EPA that's what they are. They're for the environment. So, I mean, I think they're trying to help us. Now, there may be too much bureaucracy involved. But, no, I think that's—you know, back when I was in college it was brand new and we thought it was wonderful to have that.

25 Corrigan: But that's not the view of other farmers. And that's why I want you to share your views on that.

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

30 Corrigan: To say that you—

Debbie Corse: Wayne could probably answer that better than me.

35 Corrigan: No, I think you answered it well because it's your opinion. And I told you that I was looking for a large-scale farmer who practiced environmentally, and didn't allow, as the way you see it, excuses that the environment has to be an afterthought.

Debbie Corse: Right.

40 Corrigan: And you don't. From what I can tell, and what you've shared today, you don't see it that way.

45 Debbie Corse: No. Uh-huh. We see it as a priority. I'd just like to mention this. This spring and early summer we spray—for burndown we spray a chemical called PerClot. And we spray 2,4-D

Corrigan: Yeah. I noticed.

5 Debbie Corse: They both have pretty bad drift qualities. And it's so windy here in the early spring and summer. And some farmer got stopped by—just an EPA truck driving around and got stopped because he was spraying that stuff in the wind and it was just blowing everywhere. And he got stopped and they told, "If you don't quit spraying, we're going to fine you." And he had stop. And that's another thing my son is so good about. If it's too windy, he says, "I'm not—". Because it will damage all the trees around here. And it drifts onto other people's crops. You have to be so careful about that.

10

Corrigan: Now, do you have that problem with drift coming from other farms onto your farms?

15 Debbie Corse: Yeah. The farm across from us, over on the highway where our milo is, I don't know if you saw it, but anyway, it drifted on it just a little bit. And I went out—we know this guy, we called him, and said, "You need to go look at that. You sprayed our crop." But I took pictures and everything. And told him that I did. If we see a reduction in yield from the rest of that field, we'll let him know. He said, "You just tell me, and I'll take care of it." So, yes, we do see that.

20

Corrigan: Okay.

Debbie Corse: Yeah.

25 Corrigan: Because you can only do so much to protect your own land, but you are surrounding all by other farmers.

Debbie Corse: Right.

30 Corrigan: Is it a big problem? Or is it just occasionally it happens?

Debbie Corse: It's not a big problem. It's not a big problem. No, it's not a big problem. But you have to be careful.

35 Corrigan: Okay.

Debbie Corse: You can't just go out when the wind is blowing twenty miles an hour and just start spraying. You may really want to spray that, really need to, but it won't be smart.

40 Corrigan: Because a lot of places [there] are not trees around here, especially like the buffers you have.

Debbie Corse: Right.

45 Corrigan: So, is wind a problem—I mean, is it pretty windy here?

Debbie Corse: In the early summer, it can be really windy. Yeah. Really windy. So, we've had several days where we didn't spray just because the wind was blowing too hard.

5 Corrigan: For those that aren't practicing no-till, is there a lot of topsoil loss in the area? I mean, is the—

Debbie Corse: Oh, yeah.

10 Corrigan: Go ahead.

Debbie Corse: Not so much in this county, maybe. Well, in the western part of this county, the soil gets a lot lighter. But then over by Sikeston, if you are driving to Sikeston, you can see it's just so dusty. Yes, it blows away. It blows away. You need to have something. No-till's perfect. I don't know why everybody doesn't do it. And we plant—when our milo—it's
15 this tall. And we just leave it all winter, and just plant right through it in the spring, and it just—

[End Track 44. Begin Track 45.]

20 Debbie Corse: —pulverizes. It just breaks up. For a while, we didn't think we could do that. We mowed it. But then we realized we don't have to do that. It just breaks up and you just plant right through it.

25 Corrigan: And this is the milo, you said?

Debbie Corse: Uh-huh.

Corrigan: And this is after you've harvested it?

30 Debbie Corse: Yeah. I mean, we harvest it and leave the stalk all winter. And then in the spring, we come back and just plant right through it.

Corrigan: How much of it are you leaving?

35 Debbie Corse: It's about this tall.

Corrigan: Oh, from the table here?

40 Debbie Corse: Yeah.

Corrigan: I wasn't sure, originally. It seemed like it was pretty high because it looked like you were going from the floor and I was like, "That's really high sorghum."

45 Debbie Corse: Yeah, no, it's this tall. About this tall. Yeah. No, in fact, it will re-head, if its stays warm it will re-head. Little bitty heads. But in Mexico, they harvest it all year round.

But, no, it freezes and just breaks up in the spring. We have records of our organic from the no-tilling and we've just improved our dirt so much.

5 Corrigan: I don't know why that made me think of this, do you—there weren't organic—made me think of this—do you do any type, for your own self, do you garden?

Debbie Corse: Not anymore. I used to.

10 Corrigan: Okay.

Debbie Corse: Not anymore. I mean, we have an asparagus garden. And my son has a little garden. But, no.

15 Corrigan: Okay. I wasn't sure. And I didn't pay too much attention.

Debbie Corse: My mother just canned. Did all that, too. I helped her. But, it's just two of us now.

20 Corrigan: Yeah.

Debbie Corse: Just doesn't seem like—Wayne has hot peppers, but yeah.

Corrigan: Okay. Very small scale.

25 Debbie Corse: Yeah.

30 Corrigan: Well, is there anything—kind of to wrap up just a little bit. Is there anything—it was very quick since I got ahold of you and then did this. When I said that I was coming to collect your and your husband's environmental oral history for our collection, is there anything that we missed or that you thought we'd talk about and we didn't? Or—I'm glad you brought up the cattle and that, I didn't actually know to think about that. But is there any topic, or anything, that we didn't discuss that you thought we would? Or, that—I don't know what you necessarily thought of when—

35 Debbie Corse: Yeah. I don't think so. No, I think we've covered just about all of it.

Corrigan: Okay.

40 Debbie Corse: I mean, I'm really proud of what we do. You can probably tell.

Corrigan: That's okay.

Debbie Corse: But, yeah, I think we've covered it all. We make it work.

45 Corrigan: Okay. Well, I just wanted to make sure I gave you a chance to say if there was something we missed. If you want it on the tape, we'll get it on there. But, I appreciate—

thank you very much. And this was a short time frame that we were able to put this together and I could come down. So, I thank you very much.

Debbie Corse: Oh, I'm happy to do it.

5

Corrigan: Let me go ahead and shut the recorder off.

[End Interview.]