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Interview with Mark Bennett

Daniel Tebes

Mark Bennett

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Researcher's name: Daniel Tebes

Event: Interview with Mark Bennett

Place: House of Mark Bennett, Mount Vernon, OH, 43022

Co-Workers present: None

DT: Daniel Tebes

MB: Mark Bennett

DT: This is Dan Tebes and I am interviewing former USDA extension service agent Mark Bennett at his home in Mount Vernon, Ohio. Today is Halloween, October 31, 2011. So let's begin we're we left off before the recording began. Test, test. Testing. Okay.

MB: Well, um...[pause]...I, I find it interesting that I'm talking to an extremely small little tape recorder and that was one of the thoughts that came immediately to my mind about; um, meeting spaces and so on and so forth about how technology and it's changed and how that's changed the meeting places as well. And, we could get into more of that discussion later on, but um, ah technology has ah, changed a good bit of the, um, ah, of the...the type of the meeting space that we, that we use...in my days of extension. Ah we, we used everything from, ah, outdoor demonstrations and, and, then moved, ah, when we had to go inside for presentations and so forth. You had the old carrousel projectors, ah slide shows and all those sorts of things, and today they are of course using webinars and satellite programming. And, ah, you know, technologies certainly changed the meeting spaces that we're using today. So, ah, It's kind of interesting that you're recorder immediately pushed me into that particular aside. um. [sigh], I guess one of, one of those things that comes to, uh, mind is, ah, as I think back, uh, you know, uh, the meeting place's the agriculturally that I've been involved with certainly if, ah, been like I mentioned, outdoor demonstrations. Ah, we would have, ah, meetings at farmers, ah, houses to their barns to their fields. And ah, bringing in that, their, the farmer obviously to talk about what they are doing to, ah, um, university professionals to talk about, to um, new research that that farmer might be using and also um, industry professionals to talk about what they are doing. So, um, many times we're, we're doing, um, [pause] field days where, everything from demonstrations to just discussions, um, about what's taking place, and so farmers can get, you know, um, are visual learners and we can see comparisons, test plots, that have been done different, ah, um, types of corn that are being planted, or, ah, soy beans or whatever. Um to see how different seeds compare or fertilization rates, or, herbicides treatments, just whatever, um, um, that particular farmer has used. Um, and obviously some of those, um, those demonstrations could be done on a local basis, they can also be done on a regional or state basis. Ohio State University has got um, several different research farms around the state. they also have what's called the farm science group view, which is over at the Mallick Agricultural Center over close to Belvis London, Ohio, [noise - DT], it's, it's ah several hundred acres and it's a major, major production and show in September, in September of each year. [pause] Ah, ah other types of meeting

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places of course over time have been, ah, in any, in any spot where there's, ah, a big room, and that can be from a church to a township hall, ah-um, to community building, ah, around and about ah those have all been used ah [sneeze] and particularly churches. [cough] I think one of the things that I found that was really interesting about churches is, when I first came to Knox county, ah, I learned ah that Wednesdays were, was a sacred night not to have a meeting. It's not so, ah, important now, [DT: "ah-huh"] um as there's been some transition over time, but Wednesday night in Knox county, Ohio, was church night for many, many years and it was not any thing to try and schedule a, a farmer's meeting because there were, if they didn't go to church, many of them recognized that evening as a, as a sacred evening. [pause] Ah, um, another thing that's kind of been once meeting, is two, or um, here locally are also sporting events. [DT: uh-huh] So you always pay attention to when high schools play, ah, football or basketball [DT laughter] and you avoid those nights as well.

DT: Are these meetings with farmers, or with community members, or people in, ah, agricultural products?

MB: Most of the meetings that I was involved were, were agriculturally related, dealing mostly with farmers; yes there were [pause for breath] community meetings as well that, ah, involved with ah, again you recognized that, ah, that relationship, with um, and so it could range from, ah, you know from county to county, it just depends on what the local flavor was, the local influence, [ah] on society is to ah, how you put your meetings together, so.

DT: And, ah, you mentioned, ah, a moment ago, group visits, or um farm visits, ah, that learning visually by having people visit farms, and ah, demonstrating examples of different crops or agricultural procedures ["uh hum" by MB interjected] - how often did that happen?

MB: Um...[pause]...obviously it was, ah, a lot more frequently in the, in the summer time, but um, during my involvement, um, there were probably, oh, meetings. [WIFE in background interjection - "about every night of the week"]. Yeah, my wife would say very, [WIFE laughter coupled with DT] very frequently [WIFE laughter continues] um...[WIFE: "or just four nights a week."...]...there were some class, some groups, I was very, um, involved with intensive grazing management and some grazing which is um, putting livestock on, on pasture, utilizing, um, pasture for grass-fed beef, grass-fed lamb, um, that's worth [it]. And, we institute what we call grazing councils, and they were all farm, um, visitations and we'd go and visit a different farm and we'd have a theme for that, and everybody would come and, um, those were occurring because we had one grazing council for dairy and then we had another council for beef and, and sheep herders, and so, I was attending at least two a month, one for the dairy and one for the beef and sheep producers. And so, yeah, ah, it all depended on, one the time of the year, and then two the popularity and I, if um, yeah some of the meetings we, we had maybe weren't, um, as much of interest um, to the, to the cliental and then the knowledge obviously in planting seasons, and harvest seasons, you'd try to avoid that because having a heavy meeting time

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because farmers won't [jar "clinking" sound heard in background from kitchen] um, working in and they are extremely busy at that time. [more noise from kitchen - "clinking" sound]. And another issue would [sound of chair moving] develop even in the summer time and you had to be careful of the timing of your meeting because um, ah, farmers worked, ah, maybe off the farm during the day. They would come home at night, get their chores done and so a lot of times they didn't want to have a meeting until eight-eight thirty in the evening because they wanted to utilize as much of, as of, the daylight hours as they possibly could, um. We also, um, would try breakfast meeting with, um, different groups, um, we had an agronomy club [more kitchen noise, continues through this section of interview] that, um, would like to meet for breakfast and, ah, the farmers would always loving meals with their meetings, and um. [WIFE from kitchen - "and their potbellies"]. Yeah, um, their all popular. Um, so if, if you try different things to, attract, um, the audiences as much as you could.

DT: What sort of people came to, um, these meetings?

MB: Typically, your, your more progressive farmers, um, folks who were, ah, mor..., very interested in learning and becoming better at what they were doing, um I mean, that's, that's, that's typical [movement on table near microphone - sound] or any time of meeting. Um, they [were] a lot of times folks that, um, not knowing that, um, [SOUND from kitchen] a particular subject was, um, (how do I want to term it?) knowing that that subject/topic was of dire importance for them that they knew that there would be something related to what they were trying on their won farm that would help. And so, um, there were always, um, lost of folks that were really concerned about staying in tuned with the newest and latest technology. So that was, that was, very important. Ah, let's see, what were [SOUND - movement on table near recorder] other things that we...[pause].

DT: [inaudible]

MB: The other thing as far as, um, for extension is unlike with schools, its, it wasn't required for them to come to the meeting. [DT - "Yeah"] So, again you attracted them with food, one, um, you attracted them with, ah, very interesting topics, um, and but you also had to become entertainment to them as well and finding creative and different ways of, of, giving instruction. Um, but then there was, ah, another aspect of, another thing that brought them to some of the meetings that maybe wasn't popular, but some of the meetings were required, ah for like pesticide application, if they wanted to become licensed with the, um, um, more pesticide application, they needed the training that we would give them. Um.

DT: In order to receive the license?

MB: Correct. In order to receive the license they would have to [SOUND - movement on table near microphone] have so many hours of training. And so we would offer the classes to them at different times, at um, either evenings, daytimes, you know, um, afternoons or mornings, just depending on. We'd offer multiple times just

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because maybe because somebody was working the day shift or somebody was working the night shift. And so um, that was another reason for um farmers to attend our meetings. There was also some of the, um, there agronomy classes, agronomy certification programs, I can't remember the exact title of them because they've come along since I've left, but I know of that farmers and to attend so many meetings a year for that certification as well.

DT: Yeah.

MB: [WIFE: "um. but they didn't all have that certification if they want it...] If they want it, they have to attend. Correct.

DT: And, in order to receive the like, the chemical license, um for pesticides, ah does that enable you to purchase pesticides or how does that [SOUND - microphone noise] factor in...

MB: Correct. There are certain pesticides, um [SOUND - microphone noise] there are some that you can buy over the counter just like medications. [SOUND - DT agreeing]. There are many that are restricted, restricted use chemicals. And before obtaining the license you have to attend all the training classes and then pass a test. And there are multiple tests. There's general use test, and then there's, um, another exam for each different category, say for, um, for um, ah, grain crops there's one for grasses and pastures, ah there're um, [pause] I can't remember all the different, ah, categories that they had, but um, if you wanted to [SOUND - water running in kitchen] purchase ah restricted use pesticides for that use, and spray them, ah, [SOUND - more water running from kitchen, continues for next app. minute] apply them to your fields, you had to had that license and then every so often you'd have to...I think it's every three years that you have to be re-certified and basically attending, and ah, taking the required number as well. Um, so that was, um, that was the requirement, um. For the now, many of the farmers, ah, because of the [SOUND - dishes being washed in kitchen] restrictions there're so difficult, many of the farmers are using agronomists that are paid professionals that have even higher training and they can come in much like a doctor would to make recommendations for you to take to use these types of, of chemicals on your fields. That's, and so it's different.

DT: And so those folks are paid by the chemical companies?

MB: No. They're actually paid, they're hired by the farmer.

DT: By the farmer?

MB: Yes. And so [Sound - microphone noise/movement]. And so there could be, um, the local cooperative may have an agronomist that goes around and works with farmers, or there could be, um, there are individuals that are, um, ah agronomy specialists themselves and they work as independent consultants. Um, to the farmers and the farmer pays them directly. So it can happen in different ways.

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DT: It's very complicated.

MB: Yeah. [Pause]. Um. Let's see. You're also curious about, um, some of the other ways of having meeting, meeting places that you, um and other ways to make them of interest of, um, obviously bringing a speaker in from out of town, um, even from out of the country. Um for some of your bigger meetings, you could bring somebody in. um, Or, even go on tours, um. Many ah, many folks would you know take a weekend [SOUND - cat in background] and a weekend short trip that, um, that we would organize [SOUND - microphone noise/movement] um, We'd even organize, ah week long trips for longer excursions that [SOUND - inhale breath] and I remember seeing, I think it was last week, ah an advertisement for um, a farm tour to Alaska. [SOUND - mutual laughter - including MB, DT, and wife in background]. So there's different ways of attracting you know, people's interests but um, to get them to ah a meeting place. [Pause]. So there's, so there's multiple things um, [SOUND - water running in kitchen in background] ah, oh, also having [SOUND - microphone noise/movement] say if um a seed company wanted to donate some [SOUND - water running] um door prizes, you know those were always good for attracting persons.

DT: Were there places you found, where farmers came together without sort of incentives, ah or direct incentives like door prizes, etc.

MB: Oh certainly. You know a lot of the meetings were just, were just the subject/topic itself.

DT: To the extension agency...

MB: To the extension service [SOUND - DT agreement] and the conservation districts, ah, have many meetings. Of course the farm bureau. The granges - there are not too many granges anymore. But they are still, um, a very important part of their local community. Um. years ago. And I think one that's kind of disappeared they used to be called the agricultural institutes and communities would organize them on their own and I know, ah, there's [a] small town in the north east corner of Knox county called Greer and it was still having the institute in the 1990s. Ah, but I don't know if they're still having them or not. I did look on the internet ah. The institutes are still very popular and strong in Florida, but they aren't so much here in Ohio. And I think a lot of that has to do with the energy of the people who are organizing it. Same with extension. You got some agents that are um, probably very good and, and their farmers recognize their ability to put together good meetings that will attract, [and] the same with the institutes. They've just died out over the years just because of the lack of somebody to organize them, and um, and put together a good meeting. But the institutes as I recall were not as, um, they were more for everybody in the family. Um, there were meetings for, um, the farmers. There were also meetings for the housewife, or anybody who happens to be taking care of the house. They also had, um, sessions for the children and they would start on a Friday night, um, all day Saturday with the main program Saturday night and they would even [have] Sunday sessions while, but they would occur two or three

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times a year if I recall. But I don't hear so much about, the um, getting more [SOUND - water running in background]. Um.

DT: I guess stepping back for a moment, what sort of work did you do through the extension service? You mentioned, ah, visiting farms, and ah holding these meetings on a regular basis. Um, what, I guess what sort of work did you do?

MB: Eh, for, um, seven years I was the, ah county extension agent for Ohio State University Extension here in Knox County. At that particular time I took on district position with them, and I was um, a specialist working with grazing management. Specifically the management of intensive grazing, and, ah, at that point I began covering, ah the eastern half of Ohio. And that grew then to [DT: laughter] taking on state-wide responsibilities and also some regional responsibilities, ah, with other states.

DT: Were they, ah, related to intensive grazing [the responsibilities]...

MB: It was, we were all tied together, all different specialists working with intensive grazing. Correct.

[WIFE - "Would you like some cider?" DT: "Sure, um, thank you, I, I can't refuse cider." WIFE: "Would you like it cold? Or..." DT: "Yeah, yeah I enjoy it cold. Thank you." WIFE: "Mark?" MB: "Um, [pause] yeah I think I'll take a little bit please. Just a, it's not homogenized..." WIFE: "It's just..." MB: "the real..." WIFE: [inaudible - 'we press it ourselves' DT: "Wow." MB: "Yeah. So,...It shouldn't be, it wouldn't be, it shouldn't be too harsh." WIFE: "You will love it." General noise/laughter [inaudible]].

DT: I heard it was a short apple season this year.

MB: Yeah, it wasn't [WIFE: "yeah it wasn't like last year"]. Um, the good thing too because our cider press broke. [WIFE: "yeah."]

DT: Really?

MB: Yeah. [Noise in kitchen]. [WIFE: "We had my coworkers over for a party, made a good bit, but the next morning we'd finished up the apples.}. [SOUND - clinking noise from kitchen countertop].

DT: I'm sorry to hear that.

MB: Yeah.

DT: Is that by, do you crank it by hand?

MB: Yeah, um. We always get lots of comments about it, but we know we could attach an electric motor, but um [general laughter of all three parties]. [WIFE: "the same three of four people who..."] Yeah, it was a good time. You know, I, I, I don't want my comments of, um, ah talking about all these things to attract people to you know the "give-aways" and those sorts of things, meals that wasn't the key to getting

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people there. The key was to, to have, ah, good sets of topics and, and, ah, active, ah participation and those sorts of things. And also for farmers it was valuable to them not just for learning, but for the social activities, the social functions.

DT: How come?

MB: Um, I remember what Pat was referring to was every night of the week, I mean, there were, we'd have educational meetings, but we also hosted what we called the "commodity group" um, meetings once a month and, um, and there was like a Knox County cattlemen's association, a dairy service unit, Knox County improvement association, on and on and on, goes in a rather...[group laughter] you know, it did seem like there was an association for every night. But...[SOUND - microphone movement]. We had a meeting room at the extension office...

DT: In Columbus?

MB: No, here in Knox County. Yeah. And so, there were you know a dozen or so folks on each committee and they would come and do the business, and ah, to, to learn how to promote their own commodity, but, you know that would take an hour, hour and a half of your evening, and you would say okay guys, it's, you know the meeting's over, let's go, and they're, they're just getting started [group laughter], you know. it was social time now. They want to find out what everybody's been up to and what's going on, and so that's, [pause]. You know, that, so there were many times, that you know I would stay with them for a little bit, and I'd say just please lock the door, I'm going home. [group laughter].

DT: Were there regular people who came to these events?

MB: Yeah. it was just like, um, ah a regular board of directors for any group or association. And it would come together once a month and talk about activities that they would want to promote, or, or get together. Yeah, and so they'd developed friendships that they, if [they] didn't know them already they would develop a friendship, and um, so on and so forth.

[WIFE: "so are you looking at all rural kind of farming get-togethers?" DT: "Yeah, Yeah, I, that's exactly it. Especially the social aspects." WIFE: "Okay."]

DT: But you were talking about how these people, ah, came to a sort of business meeting and finished business and hung out and just talked.

MB: Yeah. That's a way for them to, to you know find out because, if you, if you're just driving down the road and you see somebody's farm and say that looks like a, a neat farm, that there, that they've got good cattle, you know you want to know more about your cattle, but your not so sure that, you're not brave enough just to drive in the driveway and start talking to them.

DT: Sure.

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MB: But if you're at the meeting, and you, hi I'm Mark Bennett, and you would introduce yourself [inaudible] I wanted to talk to you about your cattle and, and so on and so forth and, um, you know that was a good way for them to get started talking about things and they'd want to go over and visit after a while, and so you know a lot of social activities developed from that. Um, farm bureau actually had what they called a family council, and they got together on the month [WIFE: "They had a [meeting] once a month."] Yeah, and, and they that was purely a social activity of the farm bureau family council. They would get together for dinner, um, families, with kids, and so on and so forth. And there would be a, a topic for discussion but, um, that was provided by the farm bureau group. But, um, that wasn't the only socialization that happened, you'd get your visit and find out how everybody was doing and so on and so forth, but the, the topic was of some, ether, a political or a social emphasis that then went on to farm bureau on the state level or on the national level so that they could address it with either the through lobbying for legislation or something about that that nature. But those folks stuck together once in a while visited each other.

DT: How many of those, ah, what was the size of that group?

MB: [WIFE: "there were four families and then ours." Pause. "um, yeah."] I would say four to six families, yeah, were involved in [WIFE: "yeah"] and then multiple ones around the county and obviously then the state too.

[WIFE: "did you want a wife's perspective?" DT: "Sure, yeah." WIFE: "Um, when we first moved here, he was like a young county agent. We had kids, people kind of take you under their wing, and want to, I mean when we first moved here, it's like, ohhh you guys need to come out and come to dinner with us, or come to our house for dinner, and, we had one guy who invited us to [one of] those square dancing, so many times, at a grange hall. You'd just come and square dance, and, um he was kind of, you know, I think, a little, maybe, frustrated that we weren't coming because we had three small kids, you know, it, and he was a grand dad, isn't that funny? Um, and so many people were invited us to their church, you know, people just wanted to just engulf you, and Mark was going to so many meetings, and would have these dinner meetings, and he would say, well, we need to take a cover dish here, and you know like [group laughter]. I think I'm covered dished out. [even louder group laughter]].

MB: I went to a lot of them for a long time [cough] and they were long, and it was a lot with small with small kids at home, and I don't think I can go to every one of these things. It was enough for him to be there. So, I mean, great people. Really good folks who kind of had you know, see you as family." And, and, and they were really, at, very much support structures for the families themselves, um. Farmers in general are very individualistic people, very independent, um, ah, most young, um, you know I, um, [SOUND - microphone movement]. So when they do get together they want to be able to share their thoughts and ideas, um, and you know they get, ah, somewhat frustrated by you know things that they read or see in the mass media, and particularly as farming is so removed from the general public today that the, you know, there're so many concerns about agriculture, and so they read and hear

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about all of these issues, that um, of public policy being set by people who don't understand agriculture, and so these social functions became a support network for each other to say, you know you're doing the right thing, or somebody's not doing the right thing too, and they were very important, um, for these folks to get together because a lot of times they spent all day every day all by themselves until you know they come back to the house at night or whatever. So it's they were very important for those folks.

DT: I'm curious, how many examples in your experience of, that come to mind in, ah, that respect, that these examples seemed to have?

MB: Ah, specific families?

DT: Or just instances when the community came together, or as you were describing it, when they worked together.

MB: Um, I'm trying to think of something [pause].

DT: We can come back to this.

MB: Yeah. Let me see, there's something, well I should be able, I'm just trying to get a real good specific. [pause] Let's come back to it. [group laughter]. Um. You, the, the ah, one of the other examples of meeting places that, that a lot of people don't appreciate particularly cultural is the county fair. Um, and that's how it got its beginning as well, was for farmers, you know today we think of the big county fair as where young kids in 4H and FFA bring their projects to the fair for competition. Well it used to be, it was farmer Joe and farmer Bill brought their, um, their cows in or their crops for comparison, and um, they would, um, try to match them up and see who had the best genetics, and what not, and so they could find out, okay so let's use the seed from his corn because his had you know more production, and so on and so forth. Or, his bull was a better bull than anyone else's in the area. And then it's grown from that, and, and, let me back up, and then, um, you know they would get into discussions about um, not just the comparisons but ah, you know the production activities as well. Um, then it's progressed from there on up in to ah more competition today. Um, ah and, and a lot more junior fair activities, with kids and their 4H and FFA exhibits, and that's the major thrust of the, of the county fair today of more youth involvement, that's the original plot was for adults to, to bring their animals in for comparison. And that's still done today. Done open shows, what they're called open shows and that's for anybody for adults and kids, and they just don't attract, um, many folks for the audience, you know more people are willing to come watch the kids compete. That sort of thing. That's another example of a meeting place for agricultural stuff.

DT: I'm curious, this notion of a fair, what about markets, ah, are would you consider those public spaces where people come together?

MB: Certainly. Um, that's a good point. The local, um, livestock, um, market here in Knox County is producers livestock on the southwest side of town, and not only are

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farmers dropping off their animals for sale. They would walk up, there would be, um, you know a line of trucks and trailers. So you 'd walk up on the line while you were waiting to get loaded and would visit about what's going on. And you would certainly consider that a meeting space, and also while the option was taking place, a lot of farmers would sit and watch the auction, learn about the market what the buyers are paying the higher prices for. And so at the same time you would visit with your neighbor and who[ever] comes to the auction. And so a livestock auction, an equipment auction, or a farm auction, there's a lot of socialization that goes on, um, at those activities, um, and it's a good, good point. And the same thing also happens at the grain elevator as the trucks line up to unload their corn or their soybeans, and again, there's, they're sitting waiting in line, they've got time to, ah, um, do something else, and so they are visiting at those times.

DT: That's somewhat seasonable?

MB: Certainly. Certainly. But, um, you know when they are extremely busy they can still be doing something, you know gaining knowledge and visiting, and so on and so forth.

DT: How has the grain elevator changed, ah, during your time, since you moved to the county.

MB: Um.

DT: Or has it changed? I don't know. I didn't mean to ask a leading question.

MB: Um, yeah ah it's quite, quite alright. I'd say it's, it's certainly has changed, um, just through the technology that they use, as far as a meeting place. Um, I'd say it's become probably less important for the farm owner himself or herself, primarily because of the farms, most of the farms are getting larger and larger, and so the farm owner themselves are not the ones that are going, taking their grain to the ah, to be dropped off. It's a farm hand. Um, but I remember days driving by and you'd see, you know, trucks lined up and doors open and guys standing around visiting. Um, but does that still happen today. Maybe it does. I'm just not quite sure. My guess is it's not as valuable of a meeting place as it used to be. [pause]. But it's a good thought, good thought. Um, in probably the same thing as far as the livestock auction, also. Probably not as important there.

DT: So after your time as an extension agent, ah, what did you do? Did you retire then?

MB: Ah, um I retired from extension but I know work for a hardwood lumber company. I'm vice president of sales for a local hardwood lumber company.

DT: Based in Mount Vernon?

MB: Correct. Yeah. So I, I get um, ah, to sell boards. [group laughter]

DT: What sort of boards?

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MB: Um, we, we, um, we have what's considered a concentration yard and we have ah about ten mills that produce for us and we bring in freshly sawn lumber and um, we dry it and then depending on the customer we have, we can sell it to them as a rough cut board that's dry or we can cut it up and sand it down to dimension parts if they want, um, just whatever, ah, their particular specifications are, and our customers range from furniture manufacturers, flooring companies, cabinet makers, moldering, molding or door manufacturers and we market around the world, basically. [SOUND - microphone noise/movement on table near recorder].

DT: How many people are, um, at this company?

MB: Today, um, there are about thirty-four, thirty-five, somewhere in there.

DT: Wow. so I guess, um, what's the name of your company?

MB: It's called Brenneman lumber company [DT: "Brennemen lumber company"] from the South Side of Mount Vernon. If you're on parish street.

DT: I think I've seen signs for it. Are there billboards around? Or were there?

MB: We sit right on Paris street, it one of those roads that cuts through, that a lot of people use as a cut through road. [DT: "Okay."] And it may have seemed, ah, [SOUND - telephone ringing from kitchen]. Our lumber's stacked up on both sides, so, yeah. We don't really handle construction materials for building houses or anything like that. It's just all furniture and flooring. [DT: "Wow."] And so. Primarily deal in truck-load quantities.

DT: Does the lumber come from the area?

MB: Correct. Most, most everything we handle comes from either Knox, Wayne, Holmes county Cashoctin county, we get some of our material out of southern Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Kentucky but most of its right here in Ohio. Produced. A lot of the Amish saw mills are on our order supply. Yeah. Interesting.

DT: [pause]. We've touched on a lot. [group laughter]. Um, is there anything you'd like to add to, ah, your work, your time with your company, the time you served [as extension agent] in respect to these public meeting places?

MB: [pause] [I'm] Just trying to think of different things that, ah, we may have skipped over [pause]. Um, you know I guess, in summation, you know, the two big reasons for, um, meeting places to develop, um, educational and socialization with two primary, ah, functions. Um, they happened in, you know, many, many different places in township halls to grange halls, to churches to houses to barns. A lot of times you didn't want to make it too comfortable for the first because [laughter] because they're coming in from the cold and they are sitting in a warm room and, um, it's challenging to keep them awake [more laughter, pause]. Let's see.

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DT: Have they changed, these public spaces in your time here in the county? Um, in regards to the kind of people that come to them, or, um, how often or how old, or whether how old..

MB: Um, I think, um. Yes I think they have in some respects. I think, one, there are some, ah, folks that are not as involved in agriculture, ah but want to know, um, how their food is produced, and so they're curious about starting a local garden or their own garden, um. Two, having, you know ten acres that's, you know, producing, um, more produce than obviously what they can consid...something they can generate a commodity that can be sold at the local, at Owl Creek auction barn for produce is one that ahs developed um, you know, um, a market so people will, will try to utilize their land more efficiently so that they can create a little extra income so that those folks, ah, um are needing to understand how to, to grow that produce, and as I originally mentioned, to wanting to understand where their food originates and how it is produced and so forth. So those folks I think are coming, ah, to those meetings. Um, I, I think also the [pause] it's what's put inside that particular meeting is what's has changed the most and, and being the type of technology that's used. You know years ago, you know everybody the farmer was predicting, ah, ah depicted on TV as the, ah, ah not so educated individual, and so on and so forth. But today's farmer is an extremely well educated person, not all of them are, but um the larger farms are extremely educated on production soil sciences too, um plant quality too, lot's of different things geared to marketing, and they are using more advanced technology than many people are today. The technology that's used, you know, with the um, I forget the terminology, that I want to use, but they are using everything from GIS systems to, to soil mapping systems that they're all interrelated and very very technical that they can keep, um electronic maps of these fields, not just on the soil perspective, but they know every square foot and square inch of what was applied to those field from the fertilizers to the pesticides to how many corn, you know, kernels of corn were planted on one section of the farm and the field compared to another section just because the soil type changed. And, um, you know, so they've got all that data, you know, in these computers that are riding along with them in their tractors and their combines and these folks are very technically savvy now. And so it's more of what's changed inside that meeting room, um, that's um, been the biggest change more than just the meeting itself. Um, [pause] you know, you always look for places that were, um, comfortable to the audience that you wanted to bring in. um, the extension office was, um, housed in the same building as the soil and water conservation district. The, um, ah farm service agency and was also with them, you know, ah, a quarter of a mile to produce the livestock auction, and also to a farmer's dealer. And so it made it convenient for farmers to be able to come to that area of town, and that we always felt was very important. Um, [pause].

DT: Has that changed, who participates in agriculture, getting back to your point of technology. This more advanced technology now. Um, I don't know. How has it changed?

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MB: Oh certainly. Um there, there are specialists that are brought in to, um, work with farmers and to teach them how to use the type of technology, um, you know the computer specialists, and so on and so forth, and um who need to train them from [inaudible]. So certainly. That's, that's been a big change as well.

DT: Have you seen the number of farmers decrease, or, I don't increase, as a result of the technology?

MB: I haven't seen the, the statistics for some time, ah, for many, many, many years the percent of the total population, ah, who are, ah who are farmers, who are in a farm related business, is, ah, decreasing. Um over time. And I fully expect that, um, with technology that group of farmers that are, um, the large scale, scale crop farmers that's probably helped to reduce the number of farmers because the farms have gotten larger in size. Now the one thing that would be interested to look at, again thought, coming back to, because there's such a movement of people wanting to know where their food originates and wanting to have that five or ten acres of, ah, produce whether that's been enough people to off-set the reduction in large scale non-crop production, I don't know. But that would be interesting to see those statistics, and they're, that, those statistics are out there. Um, it's just not removed from seeing those. [DT: "Yeah"]. So. Yeah.

DT: Um, last question. Um, because you consider yourself a grass farmer, [MB: "uh-huh"] you are of the intensive grazing method, do you find, ah, I'm sorry I forgot my question. Can you stay in touch with other farmers that, ah, farm intensively with grass production?

MB: Yes, yes I sure do. Um, again. Probably not as much as what I used to. Um, just because that was my profession years ago. But as far as being in with the grazing councils, I, I removed myself from some of that intentionally because I needed to allow the next extension agent to develop their own, ah their own reason their, their own specialties, and I didn't want to have a positive or negative effect on that individual's so I had; I needed to let them grow but there are several people that I still stay in touch with that I, I really value their thoughts and, and um, as far as what are they doing, um, how, how are they what are they learning as far as new techniques or something different. Um, so yes, um, I still try to stay in touch with them. So.

DT: Great. Um, I don't know if you have anything more to add. [laughter].

MB: Um, I'm sure as you drive out the driveway there will be something that comes to mind.

DT: I've got a lot to work with.

MB: You pulled a lot of info.

DT: Well, thank you so much for your time.

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MB: Oh my pleasure. I, I guess...[tape end].