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Jim Griffiths oral history interview by William Mansfield, April 28, 2005

Jim Griffiths (Interviewee)
Bill Mansfield (Interviewer)

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Bill Mansfield: I always put a label on the disc by saying that this is Bill Mansfield, from the [University of South Florida’s] Globalization Research Center, talking to Dr. James Griffiths on April 28, 2005. We here in his office in Lakeland, Florida. And Dr. Griffiths, we always get people to start off by having them state their name and telling when they were born and where they were born. So, let her go.

Jim Griffiths: I’m James T. Griffiths. I was born on November the 4th, 1914 in Altaloma, Texas. That’s Galveston County.

Mansfield: Okay. Tell me about your educational background. Where did you go to school?

Griffiths: I graduated from Rice [University] in Houston in 1937. I went from there to Iowa State College, in Ames, Iowa and got a Ph.D. in entomology in 1941. (Can that be right? Yeah, that’s right.) I went to Auburn, Alabama and taught at Auburn and decided I wanted to go into the Army and got a First Lieutenancy and went into the Sanitary Corps and served in the Pacific. [I] came to Florida in 1946.

Mansfield: That was going to be my next question. How did you get involved with citrus?
Griffiths: I took a job at the [University of Florida’s] citrus experiment station. I didn’t hardly know an orange from a grapefruit. I was working on the biological control of citrus insects, which I did for five years. Then left there to sell fertilizer. That evolved through becoming a production manager in one grove and becoming the general manager of a processing plant and packinghouse. [I] ended up paying to much money for fruit and realized I was going to get fired if I didn’t quit. So I took a job with Florida Citrus Mutual and served as director of special projects with them for thirteen years and retired in [19]81.

[Then I] formed an organization called an organization called Citrus Growers Associates, INC. which is primarily my friends, but a few other people, besides, who pay me enough to keep an office open and not loose too much money. [I] represent their interests, whether it be with the Citrus Commission, or Tallahassee, Washington or, I guess I could say Paris, if I could find a reason to go there.

Mansfield: [laughs] When they asked me to start on this project I wanted to know if they could send me to Brazil. They laughed and said; “I don’t think so.”

Griffiths: [laughs]

Mansfield: So you went to work for Florida Citrus Mutual about 1969?

Griffiths: 1968, actually.

Mansfield: When I talked with you on the phone last week, you said that Florida agriculture was a microcosm for national agriculture.

Griffiths: I think it is. We are in kind of a “Never-Never Land” right now, in terms of optimism and pessimism.

Probably, in over the last fifty years the citrus growers, as a group, have been a very optimistic crowd. They were thinking about expansion, planting trees, growing the market. They don’t feel that way today. They’ve become pessimistic about the future of
the industry itself, in terms of prices—this is partly the result of the Brazilian expansion. Certainly it’s a reflection of low prices and basically over production in the world, which is Brazil and us together. But coupled with the low prices we’ve basically got a land boom going on in Florida. So they are getting offered money for groves that they never were offered before. And there are many people just sitting there, waiting for an offer so they can get out of the business.

I’ve participated in a series of meetings over the last six months, part of which, were designed to look at where we are going. There’s no good consensus. My personal opinion would be that the industry is going to down-size. Probably, within the last ten years we’ve hit our highpoint in terms of total production and I expect you’ll watch a steady decrease in grove acreage in the state. If prices get good enough you’ll see [the growers] planting again. But the planting is going to take place on flatwoods land, somewhere south of here. The “Ridge” (which was the place to grow citrus for many years) is probably going to disappear as a citrus producing area.

What will that affect be? I don’t know whether we’ll down-size from seven hundred thousand to four hundred thousand [acres], or whether we’ll down-size to two hundred thousand [acres]. But, we’re going to down-size. We’re certainly going to shift to where the bulk of the acreage is.

Whether we’ll change direction or not, is another matter. I think it’s fair to say that only in Brazil and [Florida] has there been any real capacity to produce processed oranges profitably from hundreds of thousands of acres. I don’t believe there is anywhere else in the world you can do that. Some people want to argue about China, but I can’t see [that happening in] China.

China is a rough country. They grow a lot of citrus fruit today, but they are heavy to satsumas and you can grow satsuma oranges in this world, only in places that are too cold to grow oranges. Used to grow them on the Gulf Cost of Florida, the gulf Coast of Texas, [they] don’t any more, but you can. They can take cold, when planted on trifoliate rootstock.

Mansfield: Planted on what kind of rootstock?
**Griffiths:** Trifoliate is a citrus variety but it is cold resistant rootstock. That’s what they do in China. Tropicana went over there with the idea they’d build a processing plant, if somebody would grow oranges for them. But they gave up and came home, without ever doing anything.

I’ve never been to China, but looking at the terrain, reading about it, it doesn’t strike me as the kind of place where you can plant a lot of acreage of oranges.

So if that’s true—The demand of orange juice in developed countries is substantial, if it’s offered to them.

**Mansfield:** How does Florida’s [agriculture compare] to national agriculture.

**Griffiths:** We are having small growers disappear and having large corporate ownership take their place. That’s going on everywhere. We’re in financial difficulty. That’s generally true of agriculture in the United States. Probably, our problems—to a substantial extent—extend from the concept of globalization. And just the mere threat of tariffs being removed cause’s some of that difficulty.

Certainly the competition from Brazil, who basically took our technology and knowledge to learn how to grow [orange] trees and learn how to process [oranges]. It all came out of Florida. I guess you can say that’s globalization. So in one respect we created our own monster down there. The Brazilians themselves have come up here and probably control 40% of the processing plants today, in terms of volume. Florida growers own a small percentage of the total processing facilities today. At one time they owned it all.

Those shifts over time affect us, but I think this is what you’re seeing in agriculture everywhere. They’re all in trouble. Mid-western agriculture, subsidized heavily, is in trouble because our technologies have been used in other countries to produce wheat and soybeans and corn. And they can grow it as cheap or cheaper than we can. Where we used to be able to move large quantities of small grains on the world market [now] we’ve got competition today. You can’t do that as well.

Consequently there’s problems. And that’s going on through out agriculture. Go in the grocery store and look where the vegetables and fruits are coming from—at least in the wintertime. Chile, Mexico.
NAFTA was just a blip on the screen that aggravated that situation for some crops—particularly, in Florida, for tomatoes. Citrus wasn’t particularly effected. The Mexicans don’t care that much about shipping stuff here. But they do more than they did. Whenever I get into a general agricultural group and listen to people, I hear the same kind of complaints that I hear [in Florida]. They’re not doing well.

One of my growers (he’s gone now) was an Iowa corn and hog farmer from near Sioux City. He came down here for the winter. I used to kid him, cause he was having just as much trouble making money on his farm in Iowa as he was making money on his gall-danged grapefruit grove on the east coast [of Florida]. And it was a similar sort of a thing. I guess that’s my rational. It’s what I run into everywhere I go.

Mansfield: You say it’s a similar sort of thing—is it the fact that foreign—

Griffiths: Here, you’ve got different interests that have moved in. US Sugar is a Florida corporation, but they’re a big grove owner, today. They’ve got a big processing plant. They want to get rid of the inspection service with in the plants. They are suing the Citrus Commission over paying taxes to advertise.

You can say they are Florida agriculture, [but] hell they’re probably really land speculators. King Ranch is the biggest grower in the state of Florida. [They] operate under the name of Consolidated Citrus. There isn’t any question in my mind [but] that they are land speculators. They’re land speculators today in Texas. They’re looking at what to do with all the damn land they own, in a way that’s going to be profitable over the years.

I talked to their president at a meeting in Harvard (that we attended). He talked about the fact that they were making more money at selling the hunting rights than they were growing cattle on their gall-danged land. That a sad commentary on the world.

Mansfield: That’s the same King Ranch that’s—

Griffiths: Same king Ranch? Hell yes.
Mansfield: — that’s down toward Corpus Christi?

Griffiths: South of Corpus Christi. They are the biggest citrus growers in the state of Florida.

Mansfield: When you say that they are land speculators—

Griffiths: At the moment they’ve cut a deal with a ranch that’s owned by the family of the former judge. Alto Adams here in this state. (“Bud” Adams is a nice guy. He’s interested in agriculture. I don’t know how much land he’s got over there in St. Lucie County, but probably in the neighborhood of ten thousand acres).

They’ve taken his ranch, as one ten thousand-acre entity. They’ve taken the Cloud Grove, which King ranch owns today, and used to belong to Minute Maid. (Minute Maid planted it.) Which I expect is in that neighborhood, in terms of acreage. They’ve combined the two into what they call rural stewardship program, under Florida law. Under that law you can combine chunks of land together and have planned development.

The concept is most of the land is put into general conservation areas, where it’s got to stay as raw land—wetlands, whatever, or agricultural land. But you’re going to let development take place in certain well-defined areas, where the people will be clustered and have a complete community. So, they want have to get in their damned car and drive somewhere.

The King Ranch is going to put people on a chunk of the old Cloud Grove. They are going to buy development rights, under the system they’ve set up, from the Adams Ranch Family. The Adams Ranch will stay in ranch land and native scrub, in perpetuity. The citrus grove that King Ranch owns will become a population center, in western St. Lucie County. That leaves me to conclude that they are land speculators. They came to Florida and bought land. They can hold it in citrus for five years—fifty years, make some money. But as the opportunity offers—sell it off.

Mansfield: What was it you said, the sugar corporation that—
Griffiths: The sugar corporation, I’m not sure what the hell their game plan is. But their game plan is not to look after the small Florida grower. It’s to look after themselves.

If they’re wanting to end the days of the Citrus Commission by stopping generic advertising… … the future of the orange industry isn’t what they are looking at. They are looking at—I don’t know [facetiously]—making panther habitat for Florida panthers.

Mansfield: [laughs]

Griffiths: But they own, twenty-five, thirty thousand acres of groves today.

Mansfield: You said that they were leaders in this lawsuit against the Florida Citrus Commission?

Griffiths: Yeah, they are.

Mansfield: Is that just to get rid of the tax, or ultimately undo the commission?

Griffiths: I think both. I think the immediate objective of the lawsuit is [to eliminate] the taxing authority to do generic advertising. I think there are enough studies that have been done, and common sense tells you that the Florida citrus industry wouldn’t be what it is today, or what it was five to ten years ago, without that tax. Their arguments are not very logical. Whether they will win, legally I don’t know. It’s “comme si comme ca” [so what] If the courts follow the precedent, set in the first big suit, which was California tree fruits and California—that’s a federal order rather than a state order, but those people do essentially what the Florida Citrus Commissions does. They do regulation, they do research, they do advertising. They were found to be legal.

To me that case, as I’ve heard it, pretty well describes the Florida Department of Citrus. But the lower court did not find it that way. I’m not sure it was a well-argued case. We’re now before the Florida Supreme Court and simultaneously there is a marketing-order advertising case [for beef] before the United States Supreme Court. My
guess is that the Florida Supreme Court would like to wait for the US Supreme Court to rule, before they do. Then they’ll have the advice that comes from them.

It was filed in the case of the beef check-off system. Florida has filed an amicus brief, pointing out the disparities in marketing order cases that have been held in recent years and asking for clarification, so that there is guidance. And making a pretty good case for the fact that this here is government speech as an additional argument and therefore is not subject to first amendment pleadings.

How that will work out remains to be seen.

Mansfield: I just want to make sure I understand you correctly. These people would like to undo—

Griffiths: Southern Gardens, Baron Collier, Evans Properties are the three big ones. They been joined by the Latt-Maxcy interests out of Frost Proof, that own a bunch of land. Lack-Maxy bought thousands and thousands of acres and was big in ranching and in citrus. His—I expect its his grandchildren primarily by now— saw this—They probably always bitched about paying taxes of any kind. They joined the lawsuit and Richard Graves from the east coast. And Richard is just a kook. He followed his kooky tendencies when he did this.

I’m sure his father is spinning in his grave over the way his son is behaving. I knew his father very well and he’s a different breed of cat entirely. But Richard’s crazy.

Mansfield: But if they undo—

Griffiths: If they undo this, what will happen? I don’t know. The Citrus Commission’s authority to regulate and do research will remain. There would be a substantial segment [of citrus growers] that would voluntarily pay generic advertising taxes. Theoretically, if the federal marketing order legislation had the exception for processed oranges, removed from it, we could qualify to do the same thing, under a federal marketing act. If we could get people to vote for it.
What will we do? I don’t think anybody has any idea. The fact that land prices are high, probably reduces the likely hood of re-establishing something, because people see and out.

**Mansfield:** If the Department of Florida Citrus is undone, how will that effect the small to medium sized growers?

**Griffiths:** It depends on the world’s supply of orange juice, and [chuckles] the prices processors want to pay. If the commission quits regulating and we become an unregulated industry, in my opinion that’s undesirable.

Is it really? I don’t know for sure. The market place is such that if orange juice is in short supply in the world, prices will go up. The Brazilians will benefit and so will we. And that would change a lot of people’s attitudes.

You’ll see that with grapefruit growers. Up to two years ago, the grapefruit growers where loosing money and going broke. [But] between the hurricanes taking the crop off and raising prices. I guess I picked half a crop of grapefruit and I’ll get several times for it, what I would have gotten had there been no hurricane and I had the whole crop.

But the hurricanes, in stripping foliage off of sick trees on the east coast—trees sick with trusteza disease there will be a big acreage over there that will never come out of this whole mess. It will die off. It will either be sold off as subdivision land or it will just sit there. So grapefruit is going to be in short supply—I think—in the immediate future. So it’s going to bring good prices.

I had a guy tell me last night, “The thing to plant is grapefruit.” I said, “Yeah, that’s just a typical damned grower. The minute the price goes up, you want to go out and plant trees.” That’s true everywhere you go. Name a crop and they do it.

**Mansfield:** Yes, that’s for sure.

**Griffiths:** I remember having a talk with some Del Monte vice presidents one time. They were bragging about the cling peach marketing order and how wonderful it was,
and how good the prices were and how well it was regulating things. I got up there and got to talking about it with them (by that time they’d over produced peaches). And they said, “The problem with the marketing order is that we didn’t have any way to control planting.” I said, “No, you didn’t have enough controls. You want more.” Yeah, that’s what they needed.

The damn free-enterprise bastards sat there talking about how wonderful the marketing order was until they didn’t have the right regulations. They got the price up, so the damned farmers went out and planted more peaches.

**Mansfield:** I was talking to Mr. Kahn and he said one of the problems was, you know, over production and under production. And some years there’d be [a surplus and in other years a shortage] —

**Griffiths:** That’s agriculture.

**Mansfield:** With orange juice in particular, what—in the 80’s there was a series of bad freezes and that opened the door for Brazilian oranges?

**Griffiths:** Yep. Brazil’s first door was opened following the 62 freeze. [That’s when] we began to use some Brazilian [oranges]. And there was a freeze in the late 60’s and another one in the early 70’s that reduced crops [here in Florida]. That further stimulated the Brazilians. And we had people from up here tell then how to plant trees and grow fruit.

**Mansfield:** Well he said there was some effort among the growers to form—I don’t know what to call it—a co-op or stabilization program—

**Griffiths:** Yeah, he followed my line. Marvin is one of my good members.

I’d been promoting the idea for sometime, that we ought to find a way, with the Brazilians, to collect some money from them and from us, to expand demand in Europe,
so that the Brazilians didn’t want to come up here. And you wouldn’t have to expand it very much over there to get it in that position.

In the early 90’s Dan Santangelo was running the Citrus Commission. He made a run at this with some Brazilians when he was down in Brazil. [But he] didn’t get anywhere.

Just this last December there was a group of Brazilian growers up here. [They weren’t] associated with processing plants. They were here and I was kidding them. I said “We got a deal with NASA, using their satellite technology; we’re going to be able to count the damn [orange] trees in Brazil and figure out how much gall-danged acreage you really got down there.” I thought maybe they’d be unhappy [with that remark]. Hell! They were delighted! They said, “Give us the results. We can’t figure out how much acreage we got or how many trees [we have]. We’d like to see that done!”

When I talked with the NASA people [they said] “Don’t ever mention this to Brazilians. We’d be spying on them.” And I thought, “Hell, they’d liked to be spied on.”

Mansfield: [laughs]

Griffiths: Anyway, that group was talked with and Marvin [Kahn] has been carrying on an E-mail correspondence with a guy that heads up a large grower organization down there, [that was] basically formed (I think) by the government. They were interested. Will something ever [come of it]? I don’t know. It may well.

Mansfield: The impression I got from him was that the growers here couldn’t agree on who would fund it and how the profits from it would be allocated to the —

Griffiths: No, there are some unknowns. I think the Citrus Commission could do it, theoretically. [But] they have to want to. At the moment I don’t think we have a particularly good Citrus Commission. They don’t seem to think very much. (Not that they haven’t had predecessors that did the same thing.) But there is no real leadership in the industry today, somebody standing up and waving a flag and saying, “Lets go!” We’ve
had that on occasion, in the past. [We] keep hoping someone will come up, but so far nobody has.

**Mansfield:** So this effort to organize a —

**Griffiths:** I scared the lawyers at the USDA. I told them I wanted an orange juice OPEC; where Brazil and Florida control the world market on orange juice. If we can get together, [there’s] no telling what we could do. Just like OPEC operates.

**Mansfield:** It’d be OJPEC.

**Griffiths:** Yeah, I talked with a guy named Ademarvel Garcia, who heads the—you might say—the processors association in Brazil. He’s favorably inclined. I know the Cutrale interests have been talked to directly. They are the biggest [orange juice] people in Brazil. The Florida Department of Citrus, or the Citrus Commission has never taken a position on it, one way or the other.

If their executive director thought it was a good idea and wanted to propose doing it, they would go along. But as long as he doesn’t say, “I want to do it.” They probably won’t do anything. They don’t want to think past next Tuesday.

The possibility exists. Is it likely to come to fruition in the next year or two? I wouldn’t think so. However, if prices should happen to get better—certainly they are better now. The odds are we don’t have a real bumper crop this next year. The population is expanding we may have reasonably good prices for the next few years. If we do that will change people’s attitudes.

**Mansfield:** Okay, but the impression that I got from him was that this was something that was proposed a while back and never went anywhere.

**Griffiths:** It’s been proposed over the last couple years, or more, and it’s never going anywhere. Primarily, because no organization, no major grower organization, the Florida Department of Citrus, the processors themselves, have not shown any real interest.
Mansfield: One of the things, in interviewing people, they’ve talked about Florida Citrus Mutual, as the representative of the growers, the processors and the packers—

Griffiths: No. It’s solely the representative of growers and their— And unfortunately today their prime purpose is to find out ways to get more money out of Tallahassee and Washington. They never have an idea about something you can do good for the industry, other than associated with research.

Mansfield: This is Florida Citrus Mutual?

Griffiths: Florida Citrus Mutual. Florida Citrus Mutual, in the past, has been associated with active programs within the citrus industry and done something. It’s hard to get them to take a position on anything today, pro or con, that is controversial.

Their executive director [is] Andy LaVigne, a nice young man. He got his practical education working for Congressman Tom Lewis and he damned well learned how to sit on a fence and never get into trouble because he never took a position. Politicians are good at that.

Mansfield: You’re not the first person to tell me that.

Griffiths: I would hope not. I would hope that’s generally well recognized. Because of their inefficiencies and inadequacies at Mutual, other grower groups began forming, probably ten or fifteen years ago. And you got Gulf Coast Citrus Growers down South. You got Peace River Valley [Citrus Growers], in the Peace River. You got Highlands County [Citrus Growers association] in Highlands County. The Indian River Citrus League has always been here, it’s basically a packers association rather than a grower’s association (They claim they are a grower’s organization). They represent growers, to a certain extend, but they’ve only represented the grapefruit interests on the east coast. Those organizations today are all struggling to stay alive. They are competing with Mutual for membership. [And] none of them stand up and offer any real leadership.
For example, I believe that we ought to have a common tariff policy. I wrote one. I went to Mutual and the Citrus Commission and said I want you to adopt a common policy that we can then get the other organizations to sign on to. Then get the California and Texas interests to agree with us and then hopefully get Mexico and Central American to agree with us, because they can come in here duty free. They have a greater state in maintaining the tariff than we do.

I’ve finally gotten both Mutual and the Commission to agree and to sign the damn thing. I left it up to Andy LaVigne to get the other organizations to get on it and he wouldn’t doing a damn thing. So I went over there and said, “Andy, if you don’t want to get these guys to sign. I’ll do it, if you’ll let me.” [He said] “Okay, fine.” I’ve now got all the grower organization names on the dotted line. Don’t have the packers, don’t have the processors. I’ll get the packers next month.

Will I get the processors? I don’t know. But why should I have to be doing that? Why didn’t Mutual do it? Last summer Andy LaVigne paid my way to Texas and California to talk to the people out there, about research and about this line on tariffs. Well, all of them agreed they wanted to help us.

This thing simply says, “until the Brazilian economy has regulatory costs and labor costs that are comparable to those of a developed country, don’t do anything with the tariff.” That’s not a bad position. Hell, we want have to do anything with the tariff for generations! [laughs]

But that’s a good common place for all of us to be. Then we’re saying the same thing to the knuckleheads in Washington, that think removing the tariff and free trade solves all problems. They’re crazy. It would only create one here, that would raise the price of orange juice to the consumers in United States. Because the Brazilians would take over the market and we’d go out of business. The price will go up.

**Mansfield:** When you went to Texas and California, who did you talk to?

**Griffiths:** I talked with the Sunkist people, from their president down to their vice-presidential level. Talked with Joel Nelson at California Citrus Mutual and talked with the Western Growers [Association]. But I wasn’t after them on tariffs, but specialty crops
in general. In Texas, [I talked with] Texas Citrus Mutual, because there is no other organization of any consequence out there.

**Mansfield:** So that’s Texas Citrus Mutual and California Citrus Mutual.

**Griffiths:** There is no question, I’ll get the signatures, of Joel Nelson or Ray Pruitt and somebody from Sunkist on this thing, as soon as I’ve got them signed up here. And I don’t think it will take any thing but a letter to them [to get them to sign]. Then I want to dump it in Dan Gunter’s lap and say “Now go to the State Department and do whatever you can do with your contacts, to see what you can do about getting Mexico first and then [taking care of the rest].” Particularly Costa Rica, and Honduras, they’ve got more processing [plants] than any place else, down there. But that should include Jamaica and the other places in the Caribbean, that are all part of that Caribbean initiative. Roland Regan gave them free access to this country.

The minute that Brazilians can flood us with stuff, without tariffs, those [Caribbean countries] are all in trouble, ‘cause we take their product preferentially today.

**Mansfield:** Other people have told me that the smaller Caribbean [citrus] producers are as concerned about the tariff as—

**Griffiths:** I want to say [that] there is concern. [And if they’re not] they should be. I’m not sure that they are [concerned]. We don’t ever hear from them, [so I don’t where they stand.]

**Mansfield:** What is your understanding as to why Florida Citrus Mutual has been so unresponsive?

**Griffiths:** Just what I told you, Andy LaVigne’s believes in running an organization, so you don’t take positions, so nobody can criticize you. He likes to go to Washington and he likes to go to Tallahassee and as long as he’s got the money to do that, he’s happy. I think it is probably fair to say that he, and most of the other executive directors, their
prime reason for existence is to make a good living for themselves, not the welfare of their constituents; that’s comes secondary.

**Mansfield:** Well, you’ve talked about these localized grower organizations, like Hillsborough County, the Gulf Coast Citrus, you said that—what are they trying to do to affect policy change?

**Griffiths:** They’re not doing much! Because they are having trouble staying alive and their executives are having trouble getting their salaries paid. So they’re looking for members and trying to keep those they have. Therefore they [sponsor] turkey shoots and lotto tickets and I’m not sure of what all the do to try and raise money. But they spend most of their time trying to raise money to stay alive, rather than coming to the Citrus Commission and telling them what [the Citrus Commission] ought to be doing.

Now once in a while they take a position on something, but they are never out front with saying, “Let’s do it this way.” They don’t come up with any ideas.

**Mansfield:** How would you explain the lack of leadership there?

**Griffiths:** Nothing, except the lethargy of people. You know, there aren’t very many people who want to get out front and be criticized for suggesting doing something different. That takes special breed of cat.

Catastrophes and adversities sometimes produce leaders. Once in a great while you have one that comes along just cause he thinks something ought to be improved. But they are few and far between. Fifty years ago, the guy running Mutual was that kind of a person. He wanted to do something different.

**Mansfield:** And who was that?

**Griffiths:** Bob Ruthledge. Coincidentally, the man that represented Lykes-Pasco, a fellow named Bill Edwards. They were basic growers. Bill was a grower at heart, and though he ran Lykes-Pasco, he had some vision about quality improvements and doing
some things that you don’t [ordinarily see processors do]. And he had some grower instincts in him; he owned groves.

I know when I was a member of the processor’s association, as the director, back in the 60’s, I always wondered why it was that I was running the cooperative processing plant. The biggest processor in the state, at that time was called Donald Duck, but it’s what we call Citrus World, or Florida’s Natural today.

**Mansfield:** I remember *Donald Duck Orange Juice.*

**Griffiths:** It was run by a guy named Marvin Walker. I always wondered why is it that I never agree with what Marvin wants to do, and Bill Edwards and I agree all the time. Here I was, agreeing with a canner-for-profits and couldn’t get along with the gall-danged co-operative [canner]. But it was just the way Marvin looked at things. He didn’t look at them like I did. He wasn’t looking at them from the grower’s standpoint, he was looking at them from his personal, selfish standpoint.

And Bill Edwards was looking at them as the manager of Lykes-Pasco, but also “as Bill Edwards, grower.” He thought differently.

**Mansfield:** Now Lykes-Pasco is—?

**Griffiths:** The Lykes Brothers interests, which were basically cattle, and then they got into the steam ship business (I’m not sure how they got into the steamship business, but they’ve been in the steamship business for 70 years—to my knowledge and probably longer than that.)

They settled around Brooksville, originally and were in the cattle business here. I suppose speculated in land. I don’t know what they did, but they got rich. They had big cattle ranches in Cuba. When Castro took over they lost all that. But here in Florida they started planting groves in the late 1940’s, at Lake Placid and other places. They became very big growers and they became a major participant in the Pasco Packing Company’s operation, at Dade City. It was the biggest processor at that time. Basically they took over.
And where Bill had been a part of original Pasco operation, he and Emmett Evans and [Bill’s] brother Mark operated as Triple-E groves. They took over ownership and management of Pasco. Then Likes joined in, but Bill remained as the chief operating officer. And Lykes today is a substantial grove owner. They’ve got one of the—I guess he’d be a grandson, on the Citrus Commission. His name is not Lykes but he’s part of the Lykes Family. His grandfather was a Lykes, I think. (I’m not sure which one.) And they are still big cattle people.

**Mansfield:** You said, “He thought like a grower, rather than a processor.”

**Griffiths:** Yeah.

**Mansfield:** How would you describe that? How does a grower think?

**Griffiths:** He just wants money for his groves. He’s doing that which helps him do better. —That’s an interesting question.

Probably my experience would lead me to say that to think like a grower, you’re thinking more in-line of “what is good for the industry,” rather than “what is good for me?” That may not be a fair definition [but] it’s probably what I mean.

**Mansfield:** You’ve talked about processors—

**Griffiths:** You’ve got processors who look after nothing but their own damn interests. And that’s true for Citrus World or Florida’s Natural, even today, as far as I’m concerned. They tend to look more at their well-being than the well-being of the growers that own the gall-danged place.

**Mansfield:** I can never figure out if there is a cooperative relationship between the growers and the processors or an adversarial relationship.
**Griffiths:** There’s a legal relationship, in terms of ownership. I own stock in the Haines City Citrus Growers Association. Haines City Citrus Growers Association—half a dozen other packing houses, most of which are no longer in business, but they are operating as entities still. And Ben Hill Griffin’s interests, as Ben Hill Griffin, Incorporated, I’m not sure what entity. But Ben Hill has an ownership in Citrus World. So those packinghouses, through their growers: Ben Hill. Joe Davis, in Wachula put together a group of growers, that joined Citrus World as members. They are all growers. Joe Davis, Jr. is a member of the board at Citrus World. But that organization, historically, management has tended to sound far more like a processor, than like a grower.

Their current management, the headman is Steve Caruso. Steve’s father was Austin Caruso. I guess Austin’s father was probably in the citrus business in Orange County. They were basically growers. They did own a processing plant and ran a pretty good operation. Their processing plant was bought out by Citrus World, and in the deal, Steve got to be chief executive officer. Steve is better about thinking like a grower than some of his predecessors have been. But he’s not very good at it. He’s kind of adopted the Citrus World attitude, as far as I’m concerned.

**Mansfield:** And that would be?

**Griffiths:** That’s kind of looking after them as processors, not as advocates for grower interests. In other words, their interest is in “how is it better for the [processing] plant.” It isn’t a matter of “how is it good for my growers.”

**Mansfield:** I asked you if it was a cooperative relationship or and adversarial relationship—

**Griffiths:** It is legally a cooperative, under the laws of the state of Florida. It’s basically owner by growers, or grower interests, those being packing houses.

**Mansfield:** When I said cooperative, I didn’t mean a “co-op.”
Griffiths: Oh, are they cooperative in other matters? They probably cooperate with our processors. I’m not sure they cooperate to any great extent with growers. No.

Mansfield: So how do growers relate to the processors?

Griffiths: As adversaries —

[End Tape 1, Side A. Begin Tape 1, Side B.]

Griffiths: today. Fifty years ago, thirty years ago, most all of the processors were owned by grower capital or were owned by entities that owned substantial citrus groves. That is not true to day. The exact opposite is true. Most of them have no interest in groves, period. That includes Tropicana. That includes Cutrale. It includes Citrasco. It includes Dryfuss. It includes Cargill. Now some of those have gotten some groves in the process of doing some things.

Cutrale was going to plant fifteen thousand acres of groves, but he didn’t like the endangered species regulations that were being put on him and he decided “the hell with it,” and got rid of the land. So, basically, today processors are owned by out-of-state capital, not by Florida grower capital. That’s a dramatic change over a twenty year period.

Mansfield: So, with the free trade regulations, how would you categorize the processors’ position?

Griffiths: I think that’s a part of globalization. They probably won’t sign my tariff resolution. I’m going to ask them to, but their executive director says she doesn’t think they’ll agree.

I don’t know why in the hell they shouldn’t. They can’t operate here without fruit. But they might think their interests are better served some other way. I don’t know. So far they haven’t shown any interest in wanting to [sign]. I’ll take a crack at them, but— Why? I don’t know.
Pepsi-Cola owns Tropicana. They got no damn interest except in making money. *The hell with the Florida citrus grower. He’s [only] a source of fruit—for the moment.* They might, sometime, recognize that he is a necessary source of fruit. But, certainly they don’t today. I can’t imagine Dryfuss having any concern over the citrus grower. Cargill likes to advertise how wonderful they are but, by in large, they are a processor. They are a handler of the product that the farmers produce. They get along with farmers to the extent that they have to, to get that raw product.

**Mansfield:** Do you have any understanding of what the processors are doing? Anything to—from what you’ve told me it sounds like they are not doing anything to keep the tariff in place.

**Griffiths:** Not particularly. They probably give general lip service to leave it alone, but after all, if you own processing plants in Brazil and groves in Brazil, wouldn’t you like to see the tariff removed up here? I think I would if I were in their shoes.

**Mansfield:** So, I guess by their passive—

**Griffiths:** Basically they are operating for the good of their business, not for the good of anybody else. That, after all, is the basis for capitalism.

**Mansfield:** Well, how would you change—it’s hard for me to understand—

**Griffiths:** I don’t know how I’d change it. I guess that’s a function of government. The agricultural policy of the United States government (I think this is a fair statement) was probably put in place by the Roosevelt Administration, in the 1930’s. Agriculture was in deep “doo-doo” when the Depression hit. The farmers were all going broke and being foreclosed on. Roosevelt did many things, it wasn’t just farmers that were in trouble; industry was all in trouble. He did many things to help out the people in trouble and he created a lot of agricultural programs.
I would say a general agricultural policy. Between research from the USDA and between soil conservation payments and the establishment of the Soil Conservation Service and other things, he created farm policy that was different. They’ve talked about changing farm policy in the last year or two, [but] they’ve just nibbled at the edges.

Congress has not really comes to grips with how American agriculture best serves a role in the United States under the current globalization policies of the Federal Government. I don’t know of anybody that really thinks about it. There may be somebody. Maybe Grassley does. Maybe somebody like that does, but I don’t know. I’ve never seen anything that they said that made me think so.

They want to get good subsidies for farmers in the mid-west and we get a lot of money to eradicate canker out of the Federal government. But that’s not policy. That’s just sticking your fingers in the leaks in the dike. There is not a long-term purpose in what they are trying to do. When will there be? Hell, I don’t know.

Florida certainly has no farm policy.

**Mansfield:** I know. That strikes me as odd, because citrus is the second major industry in Florida.

**Griffiths:** Yeah, but we just are. [pause] Maintaining land in agriculture, from a philosophical standpoint, is a highly desirable thing to do. Keep green space between the cities. The Europeans have figured out a way to do it.

[I] can talk about England, but I can’t be sure about the rest of them. I think they are doing about the same thing. But in England, first, the zoning laws don’t let you do any thing. Then the government does not tax the land. If you don’t do anything with your land, then you have no taxes. If you put improvements on your lands—barns, fences, you have some taxes. They call them rates. But if you just want to grow wheat, and don’t put a fence around it there is no taxation from the government and there is a subsidy for growing wheat. In other words, they pay the farmer to quit grousing about the fact that he can’t develop his land and pay him [to grow wheat].
Now that’s a farm policy. It may not be the one you like, but the net effect is that they don’t have urban sprawl like we have. Their communities are fairly confined in areas and the countryside looks pretty good as you drive along.

We don’t do that here; except occasionally, somewhere. Montgomery County, Maryland has. They’ve created a system of zoning and development rights transfer that has kept land in agriculture in perpetuity. And apparently it’s working. They’ve been doing it for twenty years. How they ever got it started I can’t imagine. Because they had to isolate every parcel of land in the county and put a development right concept on it and not have everybody fighting with their neighbors over who got the most. Then they said

You can build here, if you’ve got enough development rights, but out here you can’t do a damn thing except farm, or do something associated with farming. But they got the people to buy into it.

It’s what they are doing with the rural stewardship deal that I talked about, between King Ranch. And it’s what they are doing with two hundred thousand acres in Collier County right now. Good deal! But you can’t come over here on the Ridge, when the land is owned in forty and hundred acres parcels; ‘cause you can’t get all of theme to agree to something.

Mansfield: [clears throat] Each one is afraid the other one will get more.

Griffiths: If there was the right kind of leadership you might be able to. Now they are trying to do something like this in Martin, St. Lucie and Indian River counties. (In fact there is a meeting scheduled for next Wednesday, over there. I’ll probably go.) I’m not sure Florida law will allow them to what they think they want to do. It will be interesting to see if they can.

If they can come up with an idea [to control sprawl] then we’ll have one. And that’s being financed by the counties. They are pushing to have that done. They see urban sprawl as undesirable. That’s interesting.

Mansfield: I heard a man on the radio say that urban sprawl was good because it [created jobs and] fueled the economy.
Griffiths: Well, it does fuel the economy, there is no question about that. If fuels the economy while the government fails to build the infrastructure they need and so they are constantly behind on building roads, schools, parks, etc. and no prospects of ever catching up. They want to build more houses to pay for what they haven’t already paid for and then they haven’t got anything to pay for the new ones they got in. It’s ridiculous.

Mansfield: Getting away from urban sprawl and back to free trade and citrus; what about labor immigration?

Griffiths: Well, agriculture needs cheaper labor. It used to be supplied here by the poor white and black population of Florida, supplemented by that same group of people coming out of Georgia and Alabama. There were active programs to solicit farm labor from there.

We had many things we were talking about. We (the growers did) started financing mechanical harvesting projects in the early 80’s. We were running out of labor. However, we hadn’t got that started before the Mexican boarder sprang a hell of a leak. The Mexicans arrived here in large numbers and they’ve taken over the picking chores, almost exclusively. I suspect a high percentage of them are illegal. The government doesn’t seem to be a damn bit interested in stopping illegal immigration.

It’s not just the Florida citrus industry but people all over the country that want cheap Mexican labor. And in spite of the president’s protestations, he’s not doing a damned thing about it.

Mansfield: When you talk about free trade, labor is a—

Griffiths: That’s part of the game plan. He mouths platitudes about free trade and doesn’t know what the hell he’s talking about. Talks about how he’s going to seal off the Mexican border and he doesn’t do a damn thing. ‘Cause, as far as I’m concerned, he’s got constituents that want that cheap labor. I’m afraid he is a man of very few principles.
Mansfield: It does seem, from what we’ve talked about—

Griffiths: You must never try to be logical. It will get you in trouble.

Mansfield: [Laughs] You said earlier that “Florida citrus growing is centralizing.” There are more large [growers] and fewer smaller growers.

Griffiths: Yep, that’s real.

Mansfield: What are smaller growers doing, or what could they do—

Griffiths: They are getting out of the business. I don’t know that they can do anything [to protect their farms]. That maybe a part of the way the United States wants to operate. Mid-western farms are getting larger, small farmers are disappearing. That’s true all over the country.

Mansfield: What advantages do you see to small farms?

Griffiths: A rural life-style is probably preferable to urban [living]. But apparently, as a country, we don’t give a damn.

Mansfield: What would be the advantages of larger farms?

Griffiths: I don’t see any particular advantages. They have more political clout, because they have more money. They don’t operate any more efficiently. I would suggest that in the acreage’s that I used to [care for], the smaller growers that we looked after had lower care-taking costs than most of the large corporate people did. I was doing a better job than they were.

   The individual grower has some legal opportunities where he could peddle his own fruit, if he had the gumption to do it. But, basically, we’ve never done that. They’ve been commodity producers because of the nature of the industry. [pause] I don’t know
what you do about that. I can’t say that consolidation is bad, in itself. I think the net effect of what happens is bad. Now if they do what the Colliers’ and the Elecoes are doing down their in Collier County, then that becomes good.

Mansfield: And what are they doing?

Griffiths: They are putting this rural development thing together.

Mansfield: The rural stewardship program?

Griffiths: Yes.

Mansfield: Okay.

Griffiths: But they’re doing that for their own damned advantage. They see ways to make more money out of that. The very first enterprise, the first place they are going to build a town is a place called Ave Maria. There’s going to be a new Catholic university there.

The development rights that allowed that to take place at this site is on land owned by Baron Collier. And the development rights transfer that’s taken place is going from Baron Collier’s land into that zone. Baron Collier is the only one coming out of there looking good. Right now the rest of them are sitting around hoping the hell they can do something like that later. And they probably will, because they will build more communities in there than just this one.

Mansfield: So you think it will end up—

Griffiths: I think they’ll end up preserving a bunch of agricultural land down there in that two hundred thousand acres; or a bunch of swamp land that the alligators can hold sway in. I guess that’s desirable. I’m not certain, but probably that is.
Mansfield: Well, I’ve been throwing questions at you for about the past hour, is there anything you want to say that I haven’t asked about.

Griffiths: No, I’ve said about everything I can think of to say.

Mansfield: Can you think of any body else that would be useful for me to talk to for this project?

Griffiths: Has the name Peter Spyke. Peter Spyke is over on the east coast. He is heading a committee to try and do something about land preservation in those counties. I can give you a telephone number, before you leave. He thinks about this kind of stuff. [pause]

I suppose Norman Todd, down in LaBelle would be somebody you could talk to. He comes from a grower family out of Avon Park. He’s been in the growing end of the deal. He’s retired today, but he’s still active in some of the politics down there. [See Norman Todd’s interview with Mansfield, 6-16-05.]

I’m trying to think. I had a committee formed of Jerry Newland, Peter Spyke. Oh! Mark Dubois is president of [the] Production Managers Association. He’s running a very large grove operation in Palm Beach County. He’s surrounded by people. He’s struggling. He runs an operation called Callery Judge Groves. He’s a person you might find of interest.

You’ve talked to Tim Hurner and Marvin Kahn, I guess from—
I don’t know if Ed Smoak would talk to you. If Ed Smoak, at Lake Placid, would talk to you he’d offer you a somewhat different perspective than you could get ordinarily. Ed is second generation citrus grower. His children are taking over. They way young John Smoak talked in Tallahassee, he spoke well about the future. Ed is a former citrus commissioner, [but] basically just a grower.

I can get you telephone numbers, when you get me disconnected.

Mansfield: Well, one thing I forgot to ask; I always ask people to describe their present occupation and I didn’t do that with you.
Griffiths: I’m an agitator.

Mansfield: [laughs]

Griffiths: I still own a little grove, but I’ve got enough to live on and I’m just spending my time doing things that I think are good for the citrus industry; basically, from the grower’s standpoint.

Mansfield: You’re head of—

Griffiths: I run something called Citrus Growers Associates, Incorporated, a non-profit corporation that I’m the managing director of. Frank Boius and Marvin Kahn are two of my directors.

Mansfield: And what do you try to do with Citrus Growers Associates?

Griffiths: I just do whatever the spirit moves me to do that I think is good for the grower. I go to the Citrus Commission meetings. I’m interested, right now, in land preservation, so I’m going to go to this meeting on the east coast tomorrow.

I’m on the Polk County Water Policy Committee. I spent yesterday morning with a new county commissioner, trying to educate him about water here in Polk County. I started out [in this committee] because of my interest in preserving water for agricultural use. But Polk County has the same problems with the water management district as a county that I have as a citrus grower. They don’t understand what they are doing. There is a need to work on them a little bit. You can say I’m trying. I’ve contacted the new person that’s running the South Florida Water Management District and talked with her. She’s interested. I’ve talked with Kirby Greene that runs St. Johns Water Management District. I know David More, quite well at [inaudible] the high pressure point in the Florida Aquifer is up here at I-4 and 27. Those three water management districts ought to make sure that stays there and doesn’t get drawn down. If it gets drawn down it adversely affects water all over the peninsula.
Are they doing anything? Hell no! They are sitting back, twiddling their thumbs. They give lip service to the fact that they ought to do something. Will they ever do anything? I don’t know. But that’s part of what I want Polk County pushing for.

That’s good for the citrus grower. So I can justify what I’m doing, hunting water from the citrus grower’s standpoint. But I’m putting my efforts into Polk County and that gets me from there to land preservation. They’re not doing a gall-danged thing about that. [But they] ought to be, because they’ve got as mess here. You can’t go anywhere without being in a traffic jam.

**Mansfield:** That’s for sure.

**Griffiths:** Every morning. I get tired of it and it’s only getting worse.

**Mansfield:** Well, I want to thank you for taking the time to talk with me—

**Griffiths:** Well, I don’t know what good it does you, but you can do what you please with it.

**Mansfield:** Well, I’ve certainly enjoyed it. And I want to remind you that the information that you’ve shared with me will be deposited in the Special Collections—

**Griffiths:** Okay. Send it to me when you get it put together and we’ll see what we thing about it.

**Mansfield:** Okay. And I’ve got to ask you to sign a release form.

**Griffiths:** That’s fine.

**Mansfield:** And I’ve been photographing everybody that I’ve interviewed. Do you mine if I take your picture?
Griffiths: I don’t know what you’d want one for, but be my guest.

Mansfield: Okay. Let me shut this thing off.

[End of interview.]