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Sandford Hartt oral history interview by William Mansfield, May 9, 2005

Sandford Hartt (Interviewee)

Bill Mansfield (Interviewer)

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Interview with: Sandford Hartt
Interviewed by: William Mansfield
Location: Sebring, Florida
Date: May 9, 2005
Transcribed by: Wm. Mansfield
Edited by: Wm. Mansfield

[Tape 1, Side A.]

**Bill Mansfield:** I always but a label on the disk by saying, This is Bill Mansfield from the University of South Florida’s Globalization Research Center talking with Mr. Sandford Hartt in the Agricultural Building in Sebring, Florida on May 9, 2005. And Mr. Hartt, we always get people to start out by having them state their name and telling when they were born and where they were born. So let her go.

**Sandford Hartt:** Sandford P. Hartt. I was born in Avon Park, Florida on February 21, 1924.

**Mansfield:** Okay, and tell me about your education.

**Hartt:** Well, I’m not highly educated. I attended the University of Pittsburgh and the University of Florida. I attended military school in my high school years [?Bowles?] Military Academy in Jacksonville, Florida.

**Mansfield:** Okay. How did you get into the citrus industry?

**Hartt:** Well I was born into it.

**Mansfield:** Okay. Tell me about that.
Hartt: Well my family established citrus back in the 1900’s. I was born on the property and after watching the other people working in the groves, when I got to be ten years old my dad let me go to work—by choice, not by force. [laughs]

Mansfield: [laughs]

Hartt: I always enjoyed working the citrus, so I started out at a pretty young age. Back in those days we had some tractors parked around, but nobody knew how to keep them running. They were sitting under shade trees and we worked the groves with mules and wagons. That’s how we started out.

Mansfield: So you’ve been raising oranges all of your life? Then you’re a good man to talk to about this. And I always ask people to describe their current occupation.

Hartt: Well, currently I’m doing the same thing I was doing when I was ten years old. [laughs] Only, now, I’m giving orders instead of taking them.

Mansfield: [laughs] So how would you describe yourself? An orange farmer? What would you call it?

Hartt: Well, I [raise] citrus and cattle, about 50% in each, you might say of my investment. It’s all on one property. The cattle land lies adjacent to the grove property. All though we do own some scattered lots around other areas, the primary property is at the ranch.

Mansfield: About how much acreage do you have under—

Hartt: About ten thousand acres all together. About twelve hundred acres in citrus.

Mansfield: My goodness, twelve hundred acres; that’s a lot of oranges.
Hartt: We produce about—ah—close to half a million boxes. Some years more, some years less; according to how many storms and freezes we have in the mean time.

Mansfield: Well are these oranges for juice or fresh?

Hartt: I do raise fresh sometimes, according to where ever the market prevails. I would say that 90% of the time it’s juice.

Mansfield: That’s what everybody has told me. [Juice oranges] are the biggest part of the Florida crop.

Hartt: Yeah, 90% of Florida oranges goes to juice.

Mansfield: Of course everybody is talking about the tariff imposed on the Brazilian oranges.

Hartt: That tariff’s been in existence—I got some facts from my, Highlands County Citrus organization. According to the facts it says here that the tariff was first instituted, I believe, in the 1940’s. [Looking through papers] (I can’t put my eyes right on that figure. But I remember when I reading that.) And we’ve been having tariff battles ever since.

1947, wait a minute. [looks through papers]. No, that’s not exactly right. [Reads] The frozen concentrated orange juice citrus tariff was initiated with the passage of the Smoot-Hawley Act in 1930. The Act imposes a tax of seventy cents per single strength equivalence gallon on imported citrus juice. The Citrus Tariff remained unchanged until 1947, when the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (that’s GATT) talks occurred in Geneva, Switzerland. During the GATT discussions the Citrus Tariff was lowered to thirty-five cents, per single strength equivalent gallon where it remains today.

We’ve been under attack all through the years, at different times by Congress and free trade enthusiasts. Of course there is nothing wrong with free trade. I agree with that too. We need free trade, but we need to do it on an equitable basis.
Mansfield: Yes, I’ve heard people talk about the differences between free trade and fair trade.

Hartt: Yes, fair trade. “Keeping the playing field level,” you’ve heard others [use that term].

Mansfield: Well back in ’47, when this first came up, what did you know about the tariff?

Hartt: Very little, I was in the military service at that time. I didn’t become familiar with that until quite a few years later.

Mansfield: I always ask this of everybody, what’s your opinion of the tariff?

Hartt: Well, I think it would be devastating to the citrus grower [to lose the tariff]. I don’t think it would be that bad, a negative, on the processors, because they would have more free access to Brazilian juice. Without the tariff they could buy it cheaper. Everybody’s juice would be cheaper. But the tariff keeps the price up.

By the way, the proceeds from the tariff go to the United States government, which is an asset to our budget problems in the government. And due to the deficit we can surely use every dollar we can possibly get, especially from a foreign country.

Mansfield: You’re the first person to mention that, but it does make sense, that the tariffs would go to the government.

Hartt: It sure does.

Mansfield: I reckon you could say it’s better to tax the Brazilians than us.

Hartt: [laughs] That’s exactly right.
Mansfield: But did I understand you to say that the processors are not as concerned about the tariff as the growers?

Hartt: I’m not a processor but I know that’s who buys the foreign juice, coming in. And they blend it with Florida juice. If [the processors] could buy it cheaper, they would benefit.

Mansfield: Okay. What do you foresee for the tariff? Do you think it will stay in place? Do you think it will be removed? What’s your prediction?

Hartt: Well I really don’t know. I’m not really optimistic about our being able to retain it.

Mansfield: How will it effect you if the tariff is removed?

Hartt: I think if it were to be removed, it would be removed gradually to give the industry an opportunity to adjust to the lower returns we’re going to be faced with. This is a nine billion-dollar economic impact on the economy of Florida. Ninety thousand people are employed in citrus, either growers, or employees. So it would be a tremendous impact on the economy of Florida. We’re the second largest industry in Florida behind—ah—tourism. And actually, in all fairness, if they were to include the timber industry and classify it as agriculture, we’d be number-one in the state of Florida, as far as economic impact. But now they don’t include timber; they only include the other aspects of agriculture.

Mansfield: You say you’re not optimistic about the tariff remaining in place, what makes you say that?

Hartt: I look at the way the administration is going, don’t get me wrong, I’m a supporter of the Bush Family and him as president. But he is a strong free trader and he’s made the statement that there would be no exemptions. The other industry that I’m familiar with
that was seeking an exemption was the timber industry in New England, to protect them against Canadian imports. President Bush has sent down the word that he was going to give them an exemption, but it met so much opposition in congress that they dropped it. Another case was the steel industry. They were seeking an exemption. And we all know how the steel industry has been devastated, and they haven’t succeeded either. So that’s what worries me about citrus.

I don’t know how much differently he’s going to view our industry or any reasons he would choose to give us and exemption, when he hasn’t granted it to anyone else, or the congress.

Mansfield: What was it? Somebody I was talking to said that because of last year’s election he was very attuned to Florida’s needs.

Hartt: I started to mention that.

Mansfield: What were you going to say?

Hartt: Well, Jeb Bush is his brother, of course. Jeb was seeking re-election and support. We’ve been through a presidential election and George was in a mighty tight battle himself. I think those are favorable factors. The political aspect is favorable to us. But when they go out of office, their term expire and we face future administrations, it’s all up in the air again.

Mansfield: What have you done to help effect the legislation to keep the tariff in place?

Hartt: Well, I’m on a first name basis with a couple of our representatives, Mark Foley and Adam Putnam. And I know the governor, Bush. And this subject always come up whenever I’m in their presence. So what little impact or effect I might have, that’s just about it, for me.

Of course I contribute also to their campaigns and to the citrus organizations.
Mansfield: You [mentioned] Mr. Foley and Mr. Putnam, they’re state representatives?

Hartt: No, they are both United States Representatives.

Mansfield: Oh, so they’re Congressmen up in Washington?

Hartt: Yes.

Mansfield: Well forgive me for asking that, but I’ve only been in Florida since December. There’s still a whole lot for me to learn.

Hartt: It hasn’t been too long ago that when President Bush was in route to Florida, he gave both of those representatives a ride. They told me later, and it came out in the paper, they spent the entire time of that flight, discussing this free trade agreement concerning citrus with the President. (Of course it wasn’t that long of a flight, only a couple of hours.) But they’re insiders, both of them are Republicans.

Mansfield: Would you care to share with me what they told you about that conversation?

Hartt: They didn’t tell me personally, anything. [What I know is] what I read in the paper.

Mansfield: You said that you know them, and when you get the chance to speak with them you bring [the free trade legislation] up. Tell me what you—

Hartt: The president didn’t commit anything to them. They were presenting our arguments to the President. And they didn’t get any negative response but they didn’t necessarily come home with any promises. [laughs] It’s tough.
**Mansfield:** [laughs] Yeah, I know. Politics it’s a slippery thing. A friend of mine says it’s like trying to grab a hand full of grease, the tighter you hold on to it, the less you’ve got in your hand.

**Hartt:** [laughs]

**Mansfield:** But when you talk to Mr. Foley or Mr. Putnam, what do you tell them about the tariff and its importance to Florida?

**Hartt:** Well actually they’re more knowledgeable about it than I am. Both of them being Florida Representative. One of them represents Polk County, that’s Putnam. Foley represents the East Coast, the Palm Beach area. They’ve been representatives for several years now, so they are fully knowledgeable about our problems here with the free trade agreement.

**Mansfield:** But still, I’d be interested to know, when you see them, what do you tell them?

**Hartt:** I ask them if they’ve made any progress with the President and when they’ve seen him. They met with him the last trip. They always have this as number one on their agenda, so they are pushing it. They’re being supportive all the way through.

In fact tonight I’m going to a political gathering for Mr. Putnam up in Polk County, at his ranch. They’ve got a dinner planned for him. His supporters, of course, and other people in the area are invited. So we’ll get a chance to have another run at it tonight, I guess.

**Mansfield:** Okay. Pretend that I’m him for a minute. If I was him, what would you say to me?

**Hartt:** [laughs] I have a whole page full of arguments here [shows document].
Mansfield: And this is from?

Hartt: Highlands County Citrus Growers. [Reads from document]

The question is why is citrus important to Florida and the United States? Well I think I mentioned this earlier, there is a nine million-dollar impact. Seven hundred and fifty thousand acres of grove land is involved, rather they say “Florida land.” A ninety thousand-man work force is involved. So that carries quite an economic impact. So I’d be reminding the representative of this impact and hopefully they’d use that in their arguments to the President, or any other representative in congress. We need their votes to preserve our tariff.

Mansfield: That information comes from the Highlands—

Hartt: Highlands County Citrus Growers Association.

Mansfield: Do they have some sort of—I don’t know what to call it—an education organization, or whatever, to help—

Hartt: Their position is very similar, if not identical to Florida Citrus Mutual. And that’s a statewide organization of growers. I think there are eleven thousand of us, that belong to Mutual. And we have representative at these free trade agreement [meetings]. All of these facts were compiled and arguments were put together we try to strengthen then as we go.

Mansfield: Is that to help you all—what do they call those—

Hartt: To help us preserve our tariff.

Mansfield: I was just thinking, are they “talking points?”

Hartt: Yeah, you’d call it that.
Mansfield: Just so when you speak to them, your arguments are more focused?

Hartt: Yes.

Mansfield: Tell me what else the Highlands Citrus Growers organization is doing to help protect, to help keep the tariff in place.

Hartt: [looks through documents] The history of the United State’s OJ tariff, began in 1930 and it’s been a running battle all through the years, right down to the present. And every time they have a free trade discussion or rendezvous anywhere in the world, this is always at the top of the agenda for the United State, to try and maintain this tariff. And of course we’ve got foreign countries that are trying to crack it, so they can get their imports in.

Mansfield: But, I mean, the Highlands County group sent you this [refers to documents] to help you focus your arguments.

Hartt: Yeah.

Mansfield: But I’m trying to get an understanding of the meetings that they have and what kind of input you would have into the efforts [to maintain the tariff].

Hartt: I would keep re-iterating the facts I’ve given you up to this point. Ninety percent of the world’s orange juice is produced in two locations, Florida and Brazil. [This makes] orange juice one of the most concentrated commodities in the world, from a production standpoint. But Brazil has lower production costs because they don’t have to deal with the bureaucracy Florida has to. We have environmental rules and regulations that we got comply with. Those are all expensive items. Florida growers rely on the orange juice tariff to level the playing field, to make our production costs equivalent to what [Brazil’s
is]. They get strong subsidies from their government. We don’t get a nickel in subsidies from the United States Government. Brazil’s industry is heavily subsidized.

If they eliminate the tariff it would put Florida growers out of business and give Brazil a monopoly on the world orange market. Relying on a Brazilian monopoly for an important food supply would not be in the best interest of the United States consumers. And I’m sure that’s the point of the United States Government, is to lower—to keep inflation down is to lower [the price] every food product in this country, including orange juice. And, in so doing, if they create a monopoly for Brazil, they haven’t lowered prices. In fact the result of a monopoly by Brazil would increase prices.

**Mansfield:** What was it somebody was talking about? They said that Brazil could be the “OJPEC” of the world.

**Hart:** Correct. [laughs]

**Mansfield:** What about, like, this is Highlands Country [Citrus Growers Association] what about Florida Citrus Mutual?

**Hartt:** There’s one difference in that OJPEC, is that people don’t have to drink orange juice. It’s a luxury. In the United States it’s more of a necessity, but in foreign countries it’s a luxury. People in foreign countries don’t have refrigeration like we do in this country. And we haven’t got a juice that is stabilized enough to retain its flavor if it’s just on the shelf. Consequently, we don’t have markets anywhere much but in the United States and Europe. The European community, and the United States is where 90% of the juice is sold.

**Mansfield:** That’s what I was told, it takes a developed country to [enjoy orange juice].

**Hartt:** Underdeveloped countries have very little use for it, unless it’s in the fresh stage, like in fresh oranges. But you can imagine trying to ship fresh oranges overseas?
Mansfield: [laughs]

Hartt: By ship would be the only economical way to do it. Some is probably flown over fresh, to more affluent societies, like Japan. And Taiwan, I understand, is a pretty good supporter of citrus. But those are isolated incidences.

Mansfield: The idea of shipping fresh fruit, it wouldn’t be fresh by the time it got there.

Hartt: It won’t be fresh when it got there and the cost would be too great.

Mansfield: What about Florida Citrus Mutual? What are they doing in the effort [to protect the tariff]?

Hart: Well, they have representatives at the free trade conferences. They are sitting there presenting what I’ve said, tens times better than I can say it. Not being a negotiator or a professional at this, I’m just looking at it from a producer’s standpoint.

Mansfield: That’s why I’m glad to be talking to you, ‘cause I can get the slick talk from professionals all day long. So I’m curious as to how Florida Citrus Mutual contacts you and involves you in this.

Hartt: We have printouts, weekly from Mutual and from Highlands County Citrus Growers. They printed up a pamphlet every week to keep us fully informed. They do a terrific job of that.

Mansfield: So they send out the information, but what about getting feed back from you? Ideas and suggestions?

Hartt: Oh yeah, they have representatives sitting there waiting for phone calls.

Mansfield: Have you called them?
Hartt: If I see negative adds coming across the television I get on the telephone and tell them about it. If they don’t know it, they can’t oppose it.

Mansfield: Can you think of an example where that has happened?

Hartt: Oh yeah, sometimes these adds come on, like—uh—the Cranberry Institute will say, “Cranberry juice is more healthy than orange juice.” They advertise against us to promote their product. I haven’t seen that one in a long time, but that’s the kind of add I’m talking about.

And then the other day, it was from some university, and they’d carried out experiments. And they even said, a ridiculous statement, that coffee was more healthy than orange juice. Can you imagine anything so ridiculous? But if Mutual doesn’t hear of these things they can’t make any move to combat it, through their advertising. So part of what we have to face is negative advertising by other industries.

Mansfield: So when you saw that commercial you called?

Hartt: I called in to Mutual and told them what I saw and what station I saw it on and what time it was aired. Then they can get around to doing something about countering it. If you don’t counter a negative ad, if it’s not protested, it’s liable to stick.

Mansfield: Yeah, a lot of times if people hear it on TV they assume that it’s true.

Hartt: Oh that’s a fact. Yeah.

Mansfield: What about other [stumbles over his words] Blah! I can’t talk this afternoon. What about instances other than advertising, where you have offered ideas and suggestions to Citrus Mutual?
Hartt: Well, the advertising is probably the biggest factor I can think of where I would be involved in it. Our research and development comes from more technical source. They have a research department at the University of Florida and the Feds [Department of Agriculture] have a research institute in Orlando.

A lot of the research, as far as grove care, and control of insects and those types of things, there is no way to contest that you pretty well have to accept it. They come out with best management practices. Like the levels of fertilizer that you should use and sometimes—if you don’t agree with that, and there has been a lot of protests about the recommended levels of fertilizer.

Sometimes I think the experiment stations are looking at as what’s best for the environment’s standpoint, rather than what’s best for the citrus production standpoint. We might have different interests there. I’m looking for top production and they are looking for top protection of the environment and then those recommendations ‘causes them to clash with what we’d prefer to do, for best grove care. In that way, sometimes the statements get contested.

We’ve had a lot of friction over the proper level of nitrogen to be used in citrus care. They call that BMP’s, that’s Best Management Practices. That’s what that stands for. As a result of the storms [the Hurricanes of 2004] they have come across raising those best management practice levels, because they realize the groves have been damaged by the hurricanes. They’ve relaxed their recommendations, or the limits placed on the use of nitrogen fertilizer, to try and bring the groves back to standard again.

Mansfield: I’ve read about the canker controversy, to destroy trees within so many feet of a canker infected tree.

Hartt: I’d say 99 and 9/10% of the growers would agree with the canker program. They have a nineteen hundred-foot buffer zone they like to establish around canker out breaks. Most growers would approve of that. If they didn’t approve, they’d want more. But I think nineteen hundred feet is a pretty safe margin.

A lot of individuals, like people who have back yard citrus [trees], they don’t like having to destroy their trees, if they don’t have canker with in the neighborhood, or down
the street a little ways. If it’s nineteen hundred feet away they say, “Hell, that’s so far out of my district, it’s not reasonable.” And they’ve been to court over it. I think it’s Palm Beach County, or Dade County or Broward County. One of those three counties down there, that have given us some trouble. But we’ve prevailed in court. So now they’re back to pulling and cutting trees with in the nineteen hundred-foot range.

**Mansfield:** What about the Department of Florida Citrus? How do they figure into the debate?

**Hartt:** They have an experiment station at Lake Alfred. In fact I used to be employed there. I did learn something there, I guess, about the technical production of citrus.

**Mansfield:** What about the legislative aspect of it [citrus production]. What are they doing to maintain the protective tariff?

**Hartt:** I really don’t think they are getting involved in it much, the Experiment Station.

**Mansfield:** I was thinking about the whole Department of Citrus, in general.

**Hartt:** I think you’d think more of the Department of Citrus is the old Citrus Commission. They’re another collaborating—well not collaborating. They’re another organization that parallels Mutual in fact they have offices in the same building. Then the more isolated and smaller version of that is what we have here in Highlands County, the Highlands County Citrus Growers [Association].

They all have the same objectives, but the Florida Department of Citrus it’s not a state organization. Although it is authorized by the state to levy taxes (that’s where they get their support), and the directors are appointed by the governor, it’s a self-controlled organization. It’s funded by growers; so I never really thought of it as a state organization.

**Mansfield:** Or a government organization.
**Hartt:** It’s not a government organization. But we operate under government guidelines.

**Mansfield:** I’ve read about this lawsuit, people are suing the Department of Citrus about the—

**Hartt:** They feel that the box tax is unreasonable. One reason I don’t think it’s fair either. All of this juice comes in from Brazil to the processors. And they blend it with our juice and then we pay all the tax. They haven’t got anyway, or method of taxing Brazilian growers, for Brazilian juice coming in, except the tariff. And that doesn’t go to the Florida Department of Citrus, that goes to the Federal Government’s budget.

Our money comes from growers. That’s what we do all of our advertising with. So we’re advertising Brazilian juice right along with our juice. I don’t think anybody would say that they consider that as being fair. So they are petitioning the government to relieve them of that tax burden, the box tax.

**Mansfield:** Just from what you’ve said makes me think that you would be in favor—

**Hartt:** I’d be in favor of getting my box tax relief.

**Mansfield:** I’ve also read that, that would spell the end of the Department of Florida Citrus.

**Hartt:** Well, that’s possible. It might have to be reorganized into another organization that’s—I don’t know how we would arrange for the funding. It would have to be smaller but the money more specifically directed to advertising, which is what—the reason we’re being taxed. I think there is a lot of waste there.

**Mansfield:** I’ve read things very similar to that.
**Hartt:** Travel. Funds being misappropriated. Over payment of salaries. I understand there are only two people in the Department of Citrus that aren’t making under a hundred thousand dollars. One of them is the janitor [laughs] and the other one’s the custodian. Everybody else in that facility is making one hundred thousand dollars.

**Mansfield:** Perhaps I should put my application in.

**Hartt:** The last two directors have been relieved for misappropriation [of funds].

**Mansfield:** People have told me about attempts to sort of control the production of orange juice. I don’t know exactly what to call it but, they proposed a “holding section” for years of over production.” What do you know about—

**Hartt:** I wouldn’t agree with that.

**Mansfield:** But you’ve heard about it?

**Hartt:** You know I’ve heard about it. That smacks of –production controls, that’s what it is. If they can control your production they can also control your price. They can’t just turn you loose with production without controlling your price.

Other agricultural industries function under that set-up. Corn is being controlled and peanuts, maybe cotton, I’m not sure.

**Mansfield:** They had something similar to that in tobacco too.

**Hartt:** And to tobacco too. Citrus has never had that. In my case I’d surely be against Federal controls. We’ve always managed to operate without it and I’d rather let the natural forces of supply and demand control our industry, rather than governmental control.
Mansfield: Well this man I was talking to was telling me about it. It would be controlled by the growers and they would take surplus in boom years and hold it against shortages. From what everybody tells me, in years of shortage, the price goes up.

Hart: That’s true.

Mansfield: And then over production brings the price down. This would be something to sort of level that out.

Hartt: There are tank farms that hold millions of gallons [of orange juice], even up in New Jersey and New England, they have tank farms. That’s where over production is being stored. And when there is a short supply, then they use those reserves. That’s being done already through the natural forces of supply and demand. So I don’t know if we’d benefit by government control or control by growers. I’m not really well versed in that idea. But it if was control by the government I’d definitely be against it.

Mansfield: Well he said that nobody could come to any kind of agreement, so the idea never went anywhere.

Hartt: I really don’t think it would.

Mansfield: The Florida Citrus Commission and the Department of Florida Citrus are one in the same?

Hartt: Yes, They changed the name. I guess they though they’d clean it up that way. [laughs]

Mansfield: Did they have any luck?
**Hartt:** I don’t know. Our last director just retired. And the one before him had to retire under fire. And then they went and got a guy who had been the director a few years back and rehired him. So it’s sort of in turmoil.

**Mansfield:** It seems like the whole Florida citrus industry is in turmoil.

**Hartt:** We’ve been in the doldrums, price wise. We sold juice, rather fruit, for the earlies went for sixty cents last year. The Valencia’s, which is our premium crop, I think was selling for about seventy-five cents a pound solid.

My dad told me, years ago that the only way that citrus in Florida survives is through disaster. If we don’t have a freeze or don’t have a hurricane, or a devastating drought, we don’t have any price. And it’s just about been that way. [laughs]

**Mansfield:** [laughs] I don’t know what to make of that, the only time it’s good is when it’s bad.

**Hartt:** [laughs] If you’re lucky enough to survive the storms and the freezes then you get a pretty decent price for your juice. In the meantime you’d better tighten your belt.

**Mansfield:** People have told me about the different ways of selling you juice, what long-term contracts and cash market?

**Hartt:** At times like these, when prices have been bad for several years, the long-term contracts sort of have a tendency to disappear. It’s only when the prospects are bright that these processors go out and sigh these long-term contracts with growers. And then, if you have a long range contract and the market slips into a slump for any length of time, those contracts run out and they don’t get renewed. That’s about the way it is.

**Mansfield:** How do you sell you fruit?
Hartt: I sell mine through—sometimes through bird-dogs, which are guys out buying fruit and delivered to the processors. Or [I sell] directly to the processors. At the present I’m selling directly to a processor. I sell to Cargill.

Mansfield: But bird-dogs are?

Hartt: Bird-dogs are independent buyers and they have their own harvesting equipment. They have a following of growers that they go back to every year and buy their fruit. Then they turn around and sell to the processors.

Mansfield: But selling directly to the processors, is that the same as a long-term contract?

Hartt: Oh yeah. If contracts are available you can do it that way, or you can sell it year by year, according to changes in the market.

Mansfield: And what’s your preference?

Hartt: Well I like long-range contracts if you can get a decent contract, one in your favor. I’ve sold to Tropicana on long-range contracts, but at the present time I’m just selling year to year.

Mansfield: What, they told me there was a box contract and a grove contract?

Hartt: You can sell “X” number of boxes, like I want to sell one hundred thousand boxes. If my grove is producing one hundred thousand boxes I can sell them and call it a production contract. So if the grove produces more that year that’s still how many they’ll take. They’ll take what ever the grove can do. Or if it produces less, they’ll take that. But if you sell specifically “X” number of boxes, you pretty well committed to selling them that many boxes.
If you’ve got a box contract and your grove suffers a freeze or some disaster, and your grove only seventy-five thousand boxes, they’re going to come ask you for the other twenty-five thousand boxes. You got to go buy from another grower or buy on the open market to fill you contract. So I don’t like the box contract and most people would prefer the grove contract. They call that a production contract.

**Mansfield:** Seems like with the box contract you’d be setting yourself up for trouble.

**Hartt:** You’d be setting yourself up.

**Mansfield:** Some other people have tried to explain, but it’s not taken. Could you explain the cash market? How does that work?

**Hartt:** Well, when the season has already begun and I haven’t sold my fruit yet, I’ll be sitting back waiting for the cash market to reach a point that I can sell where I’d be happy with the price. That’s pretty much what the cash market is.

**Mansfield:** So you’re acting as more of an independent?

**Hartt:** Yes, you’re independent that’s for sure. You’re not tied to anybody and you’re just sitting there holding your fruit waiting for the cash market reach a point where you want to sell it. It can go high or it can go low. You’re just taking that gamble.

**Mansfield:** So when you’re selling on the cash market there is more risk involved?

**Hartt:** Yeah. Anytime you sell fruit, you can’t get around the risk. The only way to avoid risk is with a long-range contract. And then it’s not always something you’d be happy with, because if there is a shortage in production and the price goes high, you’re stuck with that long range price and you just have to live with it. [laughs]

**Mansfield:** Sounds like a crapshoot, not matter which way you go.
**Hartt:** Anyway you look at it. Those that had long range contracts when the storm hit, were selling for whatever their cash price was, say a dollar a pound. And now the price has gone to a dollar thirty a pound. They lost out on that. But then the year before, when it was a seventy-five [cents pounds solid] they were benefiting ‘cause they were getting a dollar. So the long range prices, if you’re satisfied with a moderately good long-range contract, then you’d do all right. It takes a lot of the worry, frustration and stress out of it, cause you know what you’re going to get and there is no need to worry about it.

**Mansfield:** It sounds like a pretty stressful occupation anyhow.

**Hartt:** Well, you kind of get used to it. If you don’t you don’t stay in the business too long.

**Mansfield:** This is a question that is off the track of tariff policy and government regulation, but what is it about raising oranges that appeals to you?

**Hartt:** I like working outside and like to grow things. I have an instinct for watching things grow and doing it successfully is always gratifying. And there is something about growing objects is a little bit different from manufacturing objects. So I’ve just—having been involved in it all my life, I’ve learned to love it.

**Mansfield:** It seems like it would be satisfying, but I don’t know if I could stand the risk.

**Hartt:** [laughs] You need to develop a cash flow, so that you don’t have to worry about paying the bills.

**Mansfield:** People have told me and I have read that growers need to cut their expenditures in order to stay in business. What have you done?
**Hartt:** Well you have to always have that in the back of your mind. Cutting costs, you’re thinking about that everyday. Try to shop around and find where you can buy your fertilized cheaper. And when you get ready to sell your fruit, talk to a lot of people to find out where there might be an extra few dollars in the price. And when you’re buying equipment you got to do the same thing, shop for good prices. At the same time, when you’re buying products like spraying materials, fertilizers or herbicides, you always want to check the prices with different people so you know you’re getting the best bargain that’s out there. At the end of the day, you’ll end up saving some money that way.

**Mansfield:** What about the move towards mechanical harvesting? Some people have said that can be the salvation of Florida’s citrus industry.

**Hartt:** I’ve done some talking to some people and, in fact, Collier was planning on doing some mechanical harvesting in this season we’re in right now. But they had gone to Argentina to buy machines that they thought were superior to anything they could buy around here. But the whole thing just kind of faded a way into the sunset, it never happened. So there have bee a lot of effort in that direction, but now real progress.

They’ve got a good machine that will clean the trees real well and get the fruit on the ground, but getting up off the ground is another problem. It requires hand labor all over again, so mainly what you’ve gained is getting it off the tree, and that’s good. But then you’ve got to bring your workers in again, to get it up of the ground. But they’ve got catch basins that can be pulled along under the trees as the harvesting machine moves forward. But that is a problem they haven’t got quite worked out yet. I think they will, they just haven’t reached that point yet, a real workable catch basin.

Okay, so now you got it in the basin. How are you going to get it in your conveyer? The machine, your truck or wagon, that you use to haul the fruit out of the grove. You got to get it off the tree, onto the ground, up off of the ground and in to the wagon again. So it’s complicated. They haven’t come up with a machine, yet that can do all of those three things and do it efficiently enough to even make it worth while.
Mansfield: When it comes time to harvest your groves, do you do that yourself or do you hire it out?

Hartt: No, I have professional harvesters. They haul and harvest. The people I’m with now, this is my third year with them and they’ve done a real good job.

Mansfield: One of the things I’ve read about in this notion of trade regulation, is that the labor to harvest the oranges—

Hartt: It’s a big problem.

Mansfield: Because a lot of it has been coming from Mexico. It’s a commodity, just like oranges.

Hartt: I’m glad we got on this subject, because I don’t like the idea of open boarders where illegals come flooding across. But they’re coming across to do these kind of jobs we’re talking about.

When I was a little kid we mainly had white pickers, with a few blacks. Then it gradually mutated into all blacks. And now it’s mutated into all Mexican or Haitian. All off shore people, because Americans don’t want to do it any more. The American whites or the American blacks, just don’t want to do that kind of work. So we do have a heavy reliance on people coming across the boarder. Regardless of how they get here, whether they come legally or illegally. I guess because of the lack of knowledge, they figure they can’t get here legally, or get here fast enough to do what they want to do, so they come across [the boarder] illegally. Doesn’t cost them anything and all they can do is get sent back home. Then thirty days later they can come back again.

But there is a solution I think and I can’t understand why the administration allows these open boarders to exist. I think we could do it with a green card, which was used quite a few years back. They come across and they’d make them legal by photographs and fingerprints. Give then their green card and they can come here for six months. Then, when they’ve earned their money and done their job, they can go home.
Take the money with them and comeback next year. That way, we’ve got them documented and we know where they are and what they are doing. If they break the law or anything we can go get them and have them arrested, send them back or whatever.

But like it is now, when they come across the boarder, they bring grand parents and little babies, people that don’t even come here to work. They come her to take advantage of our system, which is hospitals, emergency rooms, social security system, welfare of all kinds. They put a stress on our city, county and state governments. More so in the boarder state than here, but still there is a stress on our economy too. Because these illegals aren’t paying their share, paying their way. They use fake social security cards and they do take out for that. Of course they never get that money back. A lot of them are working under fake cards.

I think it’s a bad situation. I really worry about it for fear that terrorists will come slipping across with the rest of the wetbacks from Mexico, or from whatever country.

**Mansfield:** A lot of people say the Mexicans, but like you said, there are Haitians, people from Central America.

**Hartt:** And an Arab can disguise himself as a Mexican, mighty easily. He could be bringing munitions in his suitcase instead of clothes.

**Mansfield:** What do you think is the future of Florida’s citrus industry?

**Hartt:** well, I think if a lot—

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

**Hartt:** — of it hinges on what happens with that tariff. If you knock thirty cents—the tariff is—what’d I say?

**Mansfield:** Thirty-five cents?
Hartt: No, the tariff on Brazilian juice is twenty-nine cents a pound. If you knock twenty-nine cents a pound off the price we’re getting, we’d still be in the ninety-cent area, we could survive with that. But this is an unusual year, following the hurricane. Before the storm it was at seventy-five cents. You knock twenty-nine cents off of seventy-five and that’s about forty-five, isn’t? You can’t break even at forty-five cents. So even those people that have a good cash flow, they’re not just going to sit there and lose money every year. They are going to think of something else to do.

They’re going to develop their land. Right now we’re in a climate where you can sell your land for development. And there are a lot of citrus areas that don’t have that opportunity. But right here in Sebring, this is a growing area and luckily, we could sell our land for other purposes. Which I don’t choose to do right at the moment, because I enjoy doing what I am doing. But if it gets to where you can’t break even with citrus then you got to consider other alternatives.

Mansfield: People have said that the pressure for development is just one of the other problems confronting the citrus grower.

Hartt: Yeah, it is. As you drive down the highway, you’ll see people now that aren’t fertilizing their groves. Their groves are turning yellow, weeds are growing up in them. They’re just not taking care of them. But they have other things in mind. They think, “Hell, it’s a lot easier to develop than to try to produce citrus.” Especially if you’re not making any money at it.

Mansfield: In talking about the lobbying efforts that is going on for the citrus tariff, the growers are obviously working to keep it in place. Can you think of anybody that working to have the tariff removed? I mean the free traders, obviously.

Hartt: “Who are we fighting against,” is you question?

Mansfield: Yes. The adversaries.
**Hartt:** The adversaries would be the—ah—I think it would be a person of a liberal political outlook that believes in loving the economic status of the world. They want the whole world to be functioning under the same conditions. And they feel like its unfair that the United States is a wealthy country. That the people of Brasil ought to have this and the people of Mexico should have it. You can’t take away from us. It’s going to lower our standards, if we begin to support foreign people’s economies.

Our economy here can’t stay at the present level if free trade is practiced without restrictions worldwide.

**Mansfield:** That’s looking at the political outlook.

**Hartt:** The political outlook is, people who want to standardize the economies of all foreign countries, to be equal or better than the United States.

**Mansfield:** No, earlier on you mentioned something about the processors, [they] don’t care where they get their juice. I was just wondering if you perceived them as possible adversaries?

**Hartt:** I don’t think—I really wouldn’t want to say that. I think they might benefit but I’m not really sure they’d be working against us.

Maybe they are, because a lot of our processors owned by Brazil. Their people have come up here and bought our processing plants.

**Mansfield:** I think a quarter of the plants—[are owned by Brazilian interests].

**Hartt:** That’s sort of clue isn’t it? That they could be working against us on that. Tropicana, of course, is domestic it’s owned by Americas. Cargill is a world organization. They own plants in all countries. Although, Cargill isn’t American family, it’s a family owned organization. Citrus World is still owned by growers. It’s a grower owned organization. But those are the only three I can name, off hand. The rest of them have sold out to Brazilians.
Mansfield: I wish I could remember who was telling me this, but they said they felt there would be a contraction in the Florida citrus industry. That some of the smaller growers will be getting out?

Hartt: I think so. As the noose tightens, those growers who aren’t as well funded will just decide, “Hell, I’ll just sell to a developer. I’ll quite taking care of my grove and maybe I’ll be able to pick oranges for two or three years. After that I’ll, bush it and sell it to a home builders or developers, or speculators.”

Then there is this canker disease, that’s taken out a lot of citrus. Some of those people may say, “I’m too old to try and plant my grove back. I’m just not going to do it. I don’t have any family that wants to do it, so I’m just going to get out.” You’ll have some of that. That’s from disease. Then this storm has damaged a lot of storms. In some of then, 70% to 80% of the tress are blown over. A lot of those people won’t try and come back. So there are different factors at work against the industry. For the high production levels we’ve been seeing, we may see a natural reduction in production of Florida citrus. Just through the normal attrition of those figures we just mentioned.

Mansfield: When I think about the industry contracting; I think about the nursery people that grow the tree.

Hartt: Yeah, I think about them. They’re planting all these huge acreage of young trees and nobody there to buy them.

Mansfield: Then there is the equipment manufactures.

Hartt: The equipment manufacturers, yeah and the tractor companies that sell the tractors.

Mansfield: It seems like a big ripple effect that reaches out, beyond—
Hartt: This figure we have had here where, ninety thousand people are involved in this [citrus]. The state’s second largest employer, after tourism. It involves nine billion dollars of income every year. So as it contracts it’s going to hurt in a lot of different departments: gas stations, car agencies, related industries (like chemical companies, fertilizer plants), parts houses, restaurants, grocery stores, right on down the line.

Mansfield: Like I said, for good or for ill, it’s an exciting time, for Florida citrus.

Hartt: Yeah, it sure is.

Mansfield: Well, I’ve been throwing questions at you for the past hour. Is there anything you want to tell me about that I haven’t asked about?

Hartt: Well, I’ve “belly-ached” about the free trade agreement, enough to put my point across, I guess, about what’s going to happen to us if the Bush Administration signs on with the Agreement of the Americas, I believe they call it. But I think we’re pretty safe with the Bush administration. I hate to call him a lame duck president, but he’s only got about three more years to go. And Governor Bush, we got him for about two more years, so I think we’re safe through that period.

I can’t say we’d be safe under another republican president, or if it would be worse if we had a Democrat. Both parties seemed to be signed on to this thing. Everybody’s got free trade hung up in their craw and that’s what they want and that’s the way they are pushing it. Look at the shoe industry. You can’t buy a pair of shoes that aren’t made in a foreign country. And that shirt you’re wearing. And your automobile. I bought a tractor the other day that was made in France. It’s a John Deer, manufactured in France.

Mansfield: I always thought John Deer was an American firm?

Hartt: They are, but they’ve got factories in foreign countries. All of our factories are going to foreign countries because of organized labor, for one thing. You know that’s
something we haven’t dealt with yet. But I think organized labor is partially responsible for this free trade kick we’re on right now.

**Mansfield:** How so?

**Hartt:** Moving away from it, going to foreign countries where they don’t have organized labor. They get cheap labor. The Mexicans aren’t organized and over in Taiwan, and China, they don’t deal with that. The products come here cheaper. Keeps down inflation. I’m sure that’s what the politicians think also. They are not necessarily free traders so much as they want to be successful in keeping inflation down. And we’ve done a good job of that. This country is not suffering from inflation—a very low level of it. And I think the fact that our industries are moving off shore and sending these products back here and we can buy them cheaper, is keeping down inflation. But with citrus, it’s a different story. If you give Brazil this business, they’ll have a monopoly because it’s not produced anywhere else. Only Mexico and a small amount in Cuba and a very small amount in Israel, but little pockets of production, here and there. (Like California still has some production.) But mainly, it’s Brazil. Brazil and the United States, they’re two-thirds of it and we’re the other third, except for these other small pockets.

If our industry is lost to Brazil, they’ll have a monopoly. And you know what happens when you have a monopoly? When it’s a monopoly they set their own damn price and you’ve got to live with it.

**Mansfield:** They charge what they want.

Well, I’ve asked all the questions I brought with me to ask and you’ve done a good job of answering them. I truly appreciate that.

**Hartt:** [laughs]

**Mansfield:** I always tell everybody that the information you’ve shared with me will be deposited at the Special Collections of the University’s library and be available for future researchers to look at.
Hartt: Sure.

Mansfield: And in order for them for them to have access to it I have a release form that I have to ask you to sign.

Hartt: Sure. I wouldn’t mind signing it. I didn’t reveal any secrets.

Mansfield: [laughs] Also I’ve been photographing everybody I’ve interviewed, so do you mind if I take your picture?

Hartt: Yeah.

Mansfield: Okay great. Again let me say thank you for letting me talk to you.

Hartt: Yeah, you’re welcome Bill.

Mansfield: Let me turn this thing off.

[End of interview.]