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Norman Todd oral history interview by William Mansfield, June 16, 2005

Norman Todd (Interviewee)
Bill Mansfield (Interviewer)

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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. Norman Todd on June 15, 2005 [sic; June 16, 2005] right here in La Belle, Florida. And Mr. Todd, 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.

Norman Todd: My name is Norman Todd. I have no middle name, because my parents got into a fight over what it should be, and I’ve never needed it. I was born in Avon Park, Florida on July 31 of 1932. So I am a native Floridian. My mother was from Illinois and father was from Maryland. So I’m a first generation Floridian, anyhow.

Mansfield: Okay. Tell me about your education.

Todd: I went through Avon Park High School. Went to the University of Florida. Majored in citrus there, horticulture. Spent two years in the Army. Came back and worked two years at the citrus experiment station, on the GI Bill. We worked six months in each of four different persuasions there, in other words—for four different departments, during that tenure. I found it to be invaluable as a basis to know what you’d learned in college.

Mansfield: If you don’t mind, tell me what you did learn?
Todd: You were in the groves, number one. In college in Gainesville, you’re not in the groves, because they don’t have a lot of groves up there. It’s more theory. So you get into the practical deal. I was in entomology, so we did a lot of bug counting—of different kinds.

I was out—uh— in the snow one time, picking leaves. We thought that when the snowstorm got through we wouldn’t have any leaves left. So they wanted us to go pick samples to get one final reading. Of course we survived that. I worked in virology. I worked in nematodes—nematology. And I also worked in soils [with] Dr. Koo, before he retired. He’s rather well known in the industry.

Mansfield: And how did you get introduced into the world of citrus?

Todd: Well I was born in a citrus grove. That was what my father did. He, bless his soul, he tried his damnedest to convince us to go into accounting or law or something else. If I’d had been smart enough I would have become a veterinarian. But my first organic chemistry course convinced me that I didn’t want to be a vet badly enough to put forth the effort that was required. I just wasn’t that quick in studies. So citrus suited me fine and that’s what I got into.

Mansfield: What was that you were telling me about your one uncle’s said about citrus being a dream crop?

Todd: Oh yeah. He was with [the food processor] Green Giant, all of their operations. His responsibility was to schedule farming to feed these plants, when they were open. You know, to prevent down time. He used to comment about what a soft job we had in citrus. We could neglect it and if we saw symptoms we could correct them. He reminded that if you saw symptoms [of disease] in spinach, you’d missed that crop. Anyway, he did a pretty good job in convincing me that it was a good product.

And it really was. It was a “Cinderella product.” I consider it the “Cinderella product” of all agriculture. ‘Cause how many people do you know that don’t like orange juice? It’s healthy for you. At one time all of the supply in the United States came out of
Florida, and California. Maybe a little bit in Texas and Arizona. But basically, Florida and California [supplied the country with orange juice]. It wasn’t until we got well up into the 70’s that we started getting into overproduction situations.

Farming, in general has always been a deal where, if you make money on a crop the general reaction is for everybody to plant that variety, so they can make money. (I don’t care if you’re talking about watermelons or tomatoes or oranges, or Orlando tangelos, or red grapefruit.) And in our business, if you have one too many boxes [of oranges] then you’re in over production. At the time the—uh—number of buyers for your product far outnumbered your local selling—ah—groups. Therefore that allowed the buyers to play one against the other, particularly in these over production deals, to get prices that were just below our production costs.

Of course that was their job, to buy this stuff as cheaply as they could. Basically we weren’t smart enough to figure out how to keep that from happening.

Mansfield: What about the introduction of Brazil—?

Todd: When I was in college, in probably 52 or 53, in ROTC we had to pick a country and do a complete analysis of that country’s capabilities. I just happened to choose Brazil. And if I’d been a little more gutsy when I got out of the Army I’d a gone to Brazil. Because it was obvious to me, from this study that they had unlimited good land, good climate and good water, to grow citrus. In other words, at the time, I could tell from my limited experience that Brazil was a utopia for the development of citrus. Of course over the years, that’s what’s happened. As the utilization of our crops has changed, like from frozen concentrate to a fresh product (not from concentrate), that kind of helped us for a while, with Brazil. Because getting fresh juice from Brazil up to this country and having it stay fresh, to make it a profitable deal [was impractical for the Brazilians]. But those problems have now been eliminated. I don’t know how many tanker ships there are that can bring fresh juice from anywhere. There are at least two, with several more being built.

So now we get into—uh—the costs that we have in this country—to produce the crop as compared to the price they have in Brazil. If you want to you can go to Israel or
Australia or South Africa—ah—their labor costs are minimal. This has what’s prompted a lot of discussion of the tariff and the necessity to have a tariff to protect our growers.

You know, a tariff does two things. It protects your industry. It protects the vast amount of money that’s generated by the industry that comes back into our economy, as in Florida. But if you will side with the consumer, you’re asking the consumer to pay more so you have the privilege of staying in business. This of course presents all kinds of interesting ways to look at it. I personally feel that it gives the growers responsibilities to try and get a little proactive themselves, to—ah—help cut down this gap.

For instance, Jim Griffiths, Dr. Griffiths—who you’ve talked to—started a project he called Twenty-Twenty. I was on that committee. When they were discussing names Twenty-Twenty, meant the year 2020. What research do we need to be in full production in the year 2020? The thing we ran into, hurricanes and canker and seventeen million people moving to Florida by the year 2020—were we going to have a citrus industry by then? How can we make plans?

Today we’re sitting on slightly more than eight hundred thousand acres [of citrus] and most people would project by 2020, there is going to be between four and five hundred thousand acres of citrus left. So, rather than calling this project 2020 I suggested that we call it “Eight Hundred.” By Eight Hundred I meant that the average production in the state of Florida is—I think—slightly under four hundred boxes an acre. My thought was that we need to double this production. We needed to find root stocks, the varieties [grafted] to them, and production methods that would allow us to double our production in citrus.

Having worked in this industry for over forty years, I’ve has blocks [of citrus trees] planted in certain ways on certain types of ground and that consistently produced a thousand to eleven hundred boxes an acre.

Your cost of producing that—we always figured about half of the cost of putting the orange in processing was labor, fertilizer, mowing (disking—whatever), to grow it. The other half was in the harvesting.

In harvesting an acre, [that] we could run $500 or so [a year for production expense], harvesting would come in a day and cost us $500 and have the crop picked. So it was almost 50/50 deal, between harvesting costs and so forth. If we could double our
production, it’s not going to cost very much more than what we’re already spending. Maybe a slight bit more for fertilizer, but the disking, the mowing the herbicides, all of these activities won’t change. Course the cost of picking will go up but, if you could double your production you could probably cut your costs by a forth. And that would be certainly right along the lines of what the tariff would do for you. Getting back the twenty or thirty cents [that the tariff costs].

Mansfield: So by doubling production would eliminate the necessity for the tariff?

Todd: I think that’s right. And as we approach a one-world [situation] it’s going to be harder and harder to keep these tariffs. There are all kinds of little games that go on now. For instance Europe will not accept fruit that’s been exposed to canker. Why? Canker will not grow in Europe. Canker is totally no problem. Maybe along the southern Mediterranean there could be a enough heat and moisture [to permit canker to grow]. Canker has to have tropical [conditions]. Canker won’t grow in California. Europe cuts us off. Why? Why did they do that?

One theory is we cut them off on clementines because there was fruit flies in them. Spain made a long protest, that buy cooling and freezing they could get fruit in with out any problems. But we cut them off. So was that revenge? And if it was revenge it is now politics and practical, not with reason. No you’re getting like the United States Senate, that operates completely with out reason.

Mansfield: [laughs] So people would say that revenge and politics are maybe the same thing?

Todd: [laughs] Absolutely. I got tickled the other day when they were talking about the prison down in Cuba [in reference to the terrorist suspects being held at Guantanamo.] Somebody said it, “It’s an embarrassment to the United State and it ought to be done away with.” And somebody added, “Why don’t we do away with the Senate too? ‘Cause that’s an embarrassment to the United States.” [laughs]
**Mansfield:** [laughs] But the 2020 project was looking a ways to keep Florida citrus alive?

**Todd:** Or to improve the growing conditions for citrus. In other words, are we planting the right spacing in trees? How do we hedge and top?

‘Course I mentioned the fact the harvesting was—ah—half of our cost. That’s one reason we have the big push on mechanical harvesting now. If you could get it picked by hand and relatively clean and whatever, that’s ideal but it’s expensive. There is a lot of work being done on mechanical harvesting. As a matter of fact I work very closely with the big Citrus Expo, setting up the program and next year we're hoping to have a program on robotics.

There is no doubt in my mind that the future of harvesting will be in robotics. But right now the future is in mechanical harvesting. The shaking, either the canopy shaking or the trunk shaking. Whether you hook on to the trunk and shake it or run “fingers” through the canopy, it’s the same thing. You’re shaking the fruit off and catching it. That saves money. That process will be developed and improved until such time that robotics catches up with it. Robotics isn’t there yet.

You see being built, going down an assembly line where the robots come and weld. Do you reckon they could do that job if the car was bouncing in the wind or whatever? Do you understand what I mean?

So mechanical harvesting, you’ve got to work in how do you handle motion? Because nothing stays the same. So it’s going to have to spot and be able to adjust and chase fruit. There in no doubt in my mind that this will be perfected. No question. But how many years off is it? I don’t know.

And I’ve been warned, “*Don’t get into robotics, you’re going to upset the mechanical Harvester.*” Bull! I’m not going to upset them. Who will run these robotic machines? They will.

They are established in this business and they will use whatever works cheaper for them and the grower. I’m saying that in [the future] it will be robotics. Most growers know nothing about robotics, so I though we’d have “Robotics 101” at the Expo next
year, if we can set it up. I’d like to have the whole program introduced by a robot, you know?

But that’s what we’re working on. Just to say, “*Those of you that are trying to line up on mechanical by shaking, or mechanical harvesting by robotics, forget it! Let’s work on mechanical harvesting and let the systems develop, as they will. Don’t take sides, just support it.*”

Because, what we’re talking about, if we could grow twice as much fruit, which could earn us 25% more and if we could harvest for half the cost, then we’re working at half the cost. This is good. This allows us, perhaps, to compete with the shipped activity [from Brazil]. But shipping is cheap.

**Mansfield:** Let me ask you some more about the 2020 information. Now when was that?

**Todd:** That was just a volunteer deal that Jim set up.

**Mansfield:** Right, but when did it take place?

**Todd:** Oh a couple of years ago.

**Mansfield:** You were on it, who else was on it?

**Todd:** There were a variety of growers on it and a good number of researchers. Maybe twenty or so. A lot of the box tax people were on it. Is that a term you’re familiar with?

**Mansfield:** That tax that every grower pays on a box of fruit—

**Todd:** For research, not for—

**Mansfield:** Advertising?
Todd: No. There are two different deals. The citrus research box tax is set up under the—uh—umbrella deal the state has for commodities. The growers voted to tax themselves, up to—I think the law said they could go up to two cents a box. But they were working in the half, three-quarter cents range.

This was setup, to be on the committee you have to be an involved citrus grower. You can’t be anything else. You got to either own work full time in [the citrus property].

Where does this money go? It goes to support research. Who has run out of money? The state; they pay the salaries but they have very little money for them to do research. So they come to the box tax with proposals to get money in order to do their research.

The Citrus Commission, these fourteen people, are appointed by the Commissioner of Agriculture. The industry submits names and he appoints them. [Service on the Citrus Commission] allows the growers to learn about research and research problems. And it allows researchers to become very close to the growers. So there are just all kinds of benefits that have come out of this deal. Production managers pushed that, gosh, some fifteen years ago.

This was my baby and they affectionately refer to me as the grandfather of this tax, but it has been very successful. I spent a lot of time convincing growers to tax themselves. We had to have 50% of the acreage and 50% of the growers to 60% to do it. We accomplished it.

Mansfield: Okay, so the box tax—

Todd: We call it a box tax. The Citrus Commission deal is an advertising tax. In other words, they are entirely. They ‘re not remotely related. So the Commission is taking eighteen and a half cents for advertising and administration. The box tax committee is going to go to a penny. So there will be nineteen and a half cents collected, but two different entities entirely. This other is strictly for research and development.

Mansfield: Okay. So Dr. Griffiths put the 2020 to look at—
**Todd:** Yeah, he was appointed to a committee that was set up to just look at the research being done in the state of Florida and try to cut out duplication of research. Projects at Fort Pierce and Immokalee, Lake Alfred and Gainesville that might all be the same project. That was the purpose of [that committee] to cut the wasted money out. It had processors and every thing on it at the time.

But—ah—he started this committee, it was [through his efforts that it was set up] and he selected a group, several members from the box tax and others. The meetings were held at Lake Alfred and all the researchers are there. It’s been an interesting deal and I always come out feeling inadequate because everyone convinces me how stupid my ideas are, but that’s good. Uh—somewhere down the line you just have to bite the bullet and know that more production is going to be the answer to this thing.

**Mansfield:** Okay. This committee looked at how to increase production?

**Todd:** It was really on what kind of research is needed. We think with mechanical harvesting coming, there has been very little work on how a grove needs to be planted to best accommodate mechanical harvesting. What’s a row space? What’s a tree space?

Skirting, how high do you skirt? Topping, at what level do you top? There ‘s all of kind of that being done in [individual] groves, but it hasn’t been done in replicated experiment, to determine what might be best.

**Mansfield:** Did they also look at challenges to the Florida citrus industry, like land use?

**Todd:** Well, that’s—Boy you’re talking about a number one project, on land use. In fact that’s what this Expo coming up in August, is going to dwell on. Uh—back in the 50’s, in ROTC we learned that one of a country’s best defenses is it’s ability to feed itself. If you look at history, those countries that could not feed themselves were not successful. So you need to be able to feed yourself. So as a farmer I say, “Okay, this is my charge. To be able to grow---” It’s a national defense operation that we ought to be in.

So, here we’re finding that Mexico can grow tomatoes cheaper than we can. (Then can grow just about everything cheaper than we can.) A lot of these Third World
countries don’t have the infrastructure to haul the food and process it. This is one thing that is holding them back. But the important thing is, when we start buying all of our food off shore, then we’re becoming dependant on “off shore.” It’s not republican or democrat or conservative or liberal, it’s a fact. It is something that those of us involved in farming feel we have a responsibility in this mess. [We need to] operate our operations in away that we can be competitive, in spite of all the government regulations that we go through, and other countries don’t. They can use herbicides that we can’t so we’re kind of working at a disadvantage. That was the main purpose of the 2020 Commission was; what can we do to stay more competitive and improve.

Mansfield: Did the issue of the protective tariff figure into this meeting at all?

Todd: The necessity of the tariff, in other words when the growers aren’t making money, the tariff becomes very important. How long can you keep losing money? At what point do you draw the line? How much are you going to spend to grow “X” crop when it is not profitable?

There is always the story of the farmer who won the lottery and he was talking with his friends and asked, “What are you going to do now?” And he said, “I think I’ll just keep farming until the money’s gone.” And that’s kind of the mind-set of farmers. That’s what they know and like, working with the soil and that’s what they want to do. So the tariff is one way to protect them, at least temporarily. But in the long run many us feel we’re going to have to adjust our own operation, to become more competitive, even with the deals.

Now, you mentioned land use. There some real far reaching projects going on, on the east cost. There is a St. Lucie Project, what do they call it, the North St. Lucie Project?—Excuse me—I don’t think I have that with me. [looks through documents]

They are looking at the question of what are we going to have to do to keep farms active. [locates document].

The North St. Lucie Project, the treasure Coast Regional Planning Council is what it is. If you build a community, you buy two sections and you put in two golf courses and
you build expensive houses around the golf courses and apartments behind that and a shopping center and so forth. What are your problems right away?

Well you got to have water. And after the water is used you have waste products. So you’re paying somebody to handle your waste products. Why not also include in this the concept that you will have agriculture surrounding this [community] on the outside. And you will take your [wastewater] and make a—oh what I’m I trying to say?

Mansfield: Bio-degradable?

Todd: Make a bio-degradable, organic out of it. You take your yard waste and do the same. You can mix then or what ever and have these agricultural properties use this for fertilizer on their properties. Also take your “gray water” and let them use that for irrigation. Well your paying to get rid of this stuff, why not pay the farmers to do it?

Now if you want the agriculture to stay. If you want the trees to make oxygen and so forth, if the returns on that fruit crop, indicate a price per acre of—well let’s say, twelve thousand dollars an acre and he can sell that for land development for thirty five thousand, or forty, or fifty, what is he going to do?

Well maybe you can work out a deal with the farmer to pay him use these wastes. And he can do this. He can work this in and make his farm more profitable, where he can say, “Well, I don’t have to sell for this thirty five thousand [dollars], I can see where it would be profitable for me to keep farming.”

Well, these are the concepts that are being worked on right now. And believe me! This is a brand new concept for both government and for—uh—your developers. And I say government because in order to be successful you’re going to have the government in there as a partner, setting up rules to go by. If you’re going to build a thousand homes, you’ve got to have “X” number of acres to get rid of your waste. You can’t pump it into the ground and you can’t drain it off. You’re going to have to utilize it.

Mansfield: Sounds like too big of an idea to be undertaken d by an individual and government would have to be involved.
Todd: This Treasure Cost deal has been working on that. You have other. Sarasota, County Commissioners, Lee and Collier County Commissioners have been working on plans to control development to set up rules and regulations. For instance, they use a banking system. If you destroy so much wet land “here,” you have to establish so much wetland over “there.” In other words it allows you to trade and balance and consolidate some.

But this other goes beyond that. Most of these fellows have become very interested in this concept. But the concept of paying farmers to—uh—take these waste products, that’s relatively new. But you can see what a boost that would be in the next fifteen years, as land becomes more and more valuable. If you have some alternate income—in other words, in addition to your oranges and grape fruit, if you can add another thousand dollars an acre, and do that for the foreseeable future you might stay n yourself, “This will be fine. I’ll keep. I like to farm and its good to have that green stuff. We’ll just do it.”

But that is a concept that’s new. But we’re going to broach that this August at the Expo down here.

In fact I think your guys [the people at the Globalization Center] ought to be interested in this. We got some speakers coming in from all over the country.

Mansfield: Well, I might come just for my own good, whether the project sends me down here or not. But one of the things Dr. Griffiths told me about, and some other people I’ve talked to are the grower organizations within the state, starting with Florida Citrus Mutual to Gulf Citrus, to [Highland County Citrus Growers Association], you know the different groups.

Somebody told me that they came up about ten years ago. [These organizations] started proliferating because Florida Citrus Mutual was not meeting the needs of many small growers.

Todd: Well, how many of anything do you know where everybody’s happy? I mean people aren’t going to be happy. Mutual tried to be everything to everybody. It’s very
similar to a preacher or a priest. You can’t [satisfy everybody]. It is impossible to be everything to everybody. It’s never been done and won’t be done.

There’s always been talk that Peace River and Gulf Citrus and Polk County [and all of these smaller organizations] ought to combine into one and have “one voice.” I think Mutual probably be well set up to work on the politics, the national and state politics of things that are going on. If they need a group at Tallahassee to work on something, then fine. Call Gulf and Peace and Highlands and we’ll send representatives up to help on these things. But, it’s hard for me to think that Mutual in Lakeland is going to be able to spend a lot of time on this river you crossed. And believe me there are a lot of problems that go on with the Caloosahatchee River. Right now everybody is panicked because Lake Okeechobee is too high and there are two ways to let [the water out], through Stuart or through Fort Myers. And they aren’t doing that. When you run that salt out, then the sea grass dies and the sea grass is a nursery of good things in the ocean.

How did the Lord control this before we came a long? I bet you that, from time to time, that sea grass got wiped out. But now that the Corps of Engineers is running the gates, they are being criticized fierce. The environmentalists are saying “Don’t drain.” You can imagine that if the dike breaks in Lake Okeechobee it can be a serious matter. So they are looking at that water soaked dike around that Lake. Florida Power and Light had Barley Bomber Swamp diked. They used that water for cooling. Well, one time that dike burst and put about a four or five foot of water over Port Myaca and that area. I was working with Latt Maxcy and we had a couple of sections down there we had to let all the cows up into the grove land, because the water was covering up their grazing.

But what is the best solution? These are very difficult problems and man is probably not smart enough t figure then out. And you can just liken that to many, many other things. My thought is if Mutual spends too much time trying to do everything for everybody, my thought was, if Mutual spends too much time trying to do everything for everybody; there going to do something for nothing. I think Andy [LaVinge], (have you interviewed him?)

Mansfield: Yes. [See Andy LaVinge’s interview with Bill Mansfield, 5-13-05]
Todd: I think he is a really a top-flight politician. His whole life has been spent in that. Personally, that’s where I’d like him to dwell. I’m not any good at [politics]. He can help us by being alert and helping manage. If the growers need a tariff for some years, he knows how to go about getting it.

I thing we have to select our battles. Peace River has problems that we don’t have. Highlands County, the “Sand People Up there have problems that we don’t have down here. East Coast [produces] primarily fresh [fruit]. We are primarily cannery, as is Peace River.

Mansfield: Cannery means?

Todd: Processed.

Mansfield: Orange juice?

Todd: Yeah. So I think these different organizations serve a very good purpose, but even in this organization here—the Caloosahatchee [River] is a major concern. But Gulf Citrus, Ron [Hamel], has five counties here. [See Ron Hamel’s interview with Bill Mansfield, 6-16-05] Glades [County] and Collier [County] they are not too concerned about the Caloosahatchee. So they say, “What are you doing for us.” If you get too big, you get too scattered on your problems.

I think that’s what Jim [Griffiths] was trying to do on this 2020. [See Jim Griffiths interview with Bill Mansfield, 4-2-05] Were do we think we’re going to be and what kind of research do we need to be god at it. His deal came and then all this junk about the land development and loosing acreage and canker came along. So we’re saying, “Okay, tell us what’s going to be left in 2020 and then we can work out the program.” So we just get chattering about what we don’t know a damn thing about. And probably don’t accomplish a whole lot. [laughs]
Mansfield: Well, getting back to the tariff, the protective tariff on orange juice concentrate from Brazil; what kind of efforts have growers made, and particularly in this part of the state, to influence legislation and keep the tariff in place?

Todd: What have I done? Not a damn thing. But I support Gulf Citrus, where I am. I’m a member of Mutual and I support mutual. So I’m—ah—ah—letting these people who have experience in lobbying them do this. And they’ve hired outside experts to help too. So—I—ah—ah—in other words, Would we like to stay in business? Yes, we would.

[But] you get into several problems. Number one, you got to stay in business now. Number two is you’ve got this influx of people coming in and your land values are going up. Do you want to have a citrus industry? What good is it for the state? And if you think it’s good to have it continue, then what are you going to have to do? What are you going to have to do? What’s going to have to be done to have this work? So it’s just that simple. It’s kind of a step deal.

But if we don’t—ah—ah—maybe these hurricanes and so forth—well they have given a boost. I sold my Valencia’s this time—I bought a grove here in 91. I sold them—!I’ve—I’ve—sold them—oh—gosh, different ways. When I was with Pauls, I could go under their contract with Trop and get a dollar a pound solids., Then when Trop started running into over production They cut off any outsiders. In other words, so—even some of the Paul Brothers couldn’t get their fruit in under the Bob Paul contract.

So I did some box deal, where they came in and picked by the box but I imagine I was down around sixty cents a pound, with—and this years—

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

Todd: — I’ve sold them for a dollar and a quarter a pound. The highest it’s been in some years, for me. But this won’t keep up. I understand that next year’s contracts are roughly a dollar, with the rise based on Mutual or processors, minus a nickel. So, that’s not as good as these floors have been. But Trop is getting off of than now.
Here’s an interesting deal. Trop has these long term contracts and say at a dollar, a dollar five minimum. Then the last couple of years they could go out and buy fruit for sixty cents, you know, on the spot market. Well how do you go into your board of directors at Pepsi CO and say, “You know we could buy this fruit for sixty of seventy cents a pound solids, but since we’re good fellows, we’re going to pay a dollar-five on these contracts.” Well how do you think that goes over in the boardroom?

**Mansfield:** Well, if you’ve already signed the contracts, you’re obliged to do it.

**Todd:** Noooo. Believe me, you can get out of these contract. You can buy your way out of them, if nothing else and save money. But –uh—uh the growers think theses contracts are non-breakable, but I never saw a contract where something couldn’t be worked out. I believe Pepsi probably has some pretty good lawyers.

So, I mean—this hasn’t happened but they are not renewing their contracts. In other words attrition is going to take that out. Well, I’ve worked with some people that set up eighteen, nineteen year contracts with Trop. They were going to plant their groves and they come back and said, “Do you think this is a good idea?”

I said, “Hell yes it’s a good idea. In other words this grove is going to become profitable in five years. Then you’re going to have twelve years of good money. If all else goes to hell after than, fine. You’ve come out well.” So it’s got to be a good deal.

On the other hand, somebody that has a grove and no contract, he’s saying, “What kind of shape am I in?” I’m saying, “You’re in pretty rotten shape.” It all depends upon the return for your fruit. And that gets us back to the tariff again.

‘Cause Brazil can sit there, on this sixty cents, or what ever and they get these ships running, with fresh juice, it’s going to be tough.

**Mansfield:** Well, going back earlier, you said that you support Florida Citrus Mutual and Gulf Citrus, when you say that could you tell me more about what it means when you support them? Does that mean you check “yes” in a block, or—do does your support [manifest itself]?
Todd: I don’t know what that means. It means—I guess it means that you think you’re better off with them than with out them. Um—um—um—you support your wife. You love your wife. Does that mean you buy everything she comes up with? The answer is no. I mean everybody is different. But I think—I think—I think is just necessary to have somebody like these guys that are working for you. Um—um—um—so do I support every damn thing they do? No. I think they just get simply idiotic at times. But that’s me.

If I could make the world the way I wanted it, would be a world pretty filled with discipline. I think discipline is the secret to overcoming hard times and the secret on how to handle good times. If you’re not disciplined, you’re in trouble. I think a lot of times these things are not very disciplined in the way they go about it.

It’s hard to get a consensus. Mutual had this big party over on the cost and three or four hundred people paid a couple of hundred bucks to go. Or whatever and they thought the program was good. Well; I don’t know what good it did, as far as the selling of my fruit. Um—um—I don’t know that growers being happy, having attended this meeting is good or bad. May be they ought to be worried [laughs]

I’m not avoiding you question. It’s just that I can’t answer it. I can’t tell you what support is, other than I honestly think that we’re better off with Mutual than we’d be with out Mutual. Uh—uh—Mutual doesn’t do a lot of things I think I’d like to see them do. But they can only do so much. I think Andy is really—he may have given some mild support to various projects. But I think he has really hung with this lobbying as something that they can do that we can’t. And I certainly agree with that.

And Indian River and Gulf and Peace River and Highlands are all very influential on effecting rout of Mutual. So it’s a—Mutual is on our side. I mean there is not question about it, as the rest of these are.

But as—as—I mean I’m a grower and I get more interested in grower problems. But on the other hand, if we can’t sell this stuff at a profit, what damn good does it do me to grow it?

Mansfield: Some people I’ve interviewed have said that they felt that Mutual was supporting the interests of the large growers more so than those of small growers.
Todd: [sighs] I was chairman of the DOC [Department of Citrus] Research – Advisory Committee for some years. I worked for Latt Maxcy which is—um may be a big organization, but I didn’t feel like I was representing a big—and–uh—I’d get so frustrated at things. One day somebody said, “How can processors ram this stuff through?” I said, “Very simple, they have better expense accounts than we do.” [laughs]. “They can go to the better restaurants.” [laughs] And I think there is truth to that. Uh—in other words—you said you studied Appalachian crafts an do forth.

Mansfield: No. I didn’t say that. I’m a folklorist but there is more to folklore than Appalachian crafts.

Todd: Okay, The thing that I’m getting at is—uh—uh—in your working with people, these “bigs” have people that are better than average persons, than the majority of us. They’re trained. They go to Dale Carnigie courses and so forth. They are designed to project and lead people. So I think it’s just—I mean—I would say, “What do you expect?” Damn right the “bigs” are going to dominate it.” And I go back to Charlie Wilson, or who ever said, that how GM goes, so goes the nation. I hope that’s true a lot of times because—ah—ah—Andy’s got to work with those who are his biggest supporters. He’s got to!

I mean he can’t go to Evans and say, “Hope you don’t mind. I know this isn’t what you want. But I’ve got a hundred and five acre growers who would like something else.” You know. So it’s just the way life is, I think.

Mansfield: What do you think is the future of the Florida citrus Industry?

Todd: Sometime ago I sat down with another old timer and we said, “Let’s count up the thinks that are going to put this industry out of business.” I don’t know we had eight or ten things that had come along that were just going to ruin the industry. And guess what, we’re still here.
So I think there is a lot of—a lot more ability to adjust than we give ourselves credit for having. Anything now we don’t like. It’s that the truth? I mean somebody introduces something new and the first thing you do is starts shooting holes in it. But yet, we’re the products of evolution. Gosh I think back in this industry—uh—uh—of things that have come along. I fact I gave a talk at the Expo about how equipment had progressed through this thing.

So—uh—uh things will never be the same. Evolution goes on. If can’t adjust to it. If you can’t make the best of it, you might as well go find something else to do. But I think the industry will be here. There is a lot of money invested in these plants. If we could double the production, we’d only need four hundred thousand acres to maintain a strong industry.

One of the big changes in this industry, Bill, is the demise of the middle class. In other words the “Bigs” have slowly bought up the land, or developed it to where a five acre or ten acre grower can no longer compete. So I do really—I do look at some alarm with the loss of the middle class. No it’s the “Bigs’ the processors and so forth, they’re not even Florida guys any more.

When I was in this business there were probably six or seven processors that were Florida owned. I remember working for Ben Hill, who I thought was a pretty damn big grower, he started some advertising campaigns. He used some “elves” called the nippers. I though it was a very effective advertising campaign. But he said, “I can’t compete with the ‘Bigs,’ I can’t compete with Snow Crop and Tropicana.” And apparently he couldn’t.

So they go their way and um—um—I tell you, ag-people has not always been as well trained and sharp as they should be. They’re just people who got land, or their dad’s had land and they just evolved into it.

One story I like to tell is, if you like football you know the Florida Gators play at Ben Hill Griffin, Jr. Stadium. Well why and the hell do they play at Ben Hill Griffin Stadium? Why aren’t we going to school at Ben Hill Griffin Ag-school? Because, very simply, because Steve Spurrier [University of Florida All-American quarterback and head football coach, 1990-2001] took Ben Hill and walked in this stadium and he walked in the weight rooms and this that and the other and said, “Listen, for fifteen million dollars, here’s what we can do.” And he painted him a picture and Ben Hill bought it.
The ag-school never did that. They never got him and said, “Listen, here’s what we could do. If you would build us a great big building, here’s what we could do. We could go into genetics we could go into this, We could really evolve the Florida ag-industry.” They didn’t do it. And the reason they didn’t do it? I don’t think they had enough damn insight to do it. So they lost. They lost a guy who really was a believer in agriculture. They lost him, because they didn’t go after him with a vision.

And here’s the deal—where are the people with vision in this industry right now? They’re hassling over the box tax, whether to have it or not, advertising or not. But this deal on additional value for ag-land is just now getting going. Oddly enough, some of the big supporters of this are non-agricultural people. They see the value in this more than we do.

**Mansfield:** And who would they be?

**Todd:** Like this Sarasota Commissioner. I don’t know him but Ron tells me about him [and] about several of our commissioners down here. They see the problem of these damn houses just lining up. Solid houses! Roads jammed and so forth. And they thing it would really be advantageous to have more—more—what should you say—plotting of development and have green spaces. It’s good for the wildlife, good for the birds, the alligators.

In other words—uh—you know—now here’s a real change that’s happened. We are getting far more support from environmentalists now than I ever thought possible. Environmentalists have come and looked at how we run our operations and they say, “Gosh, you all do care!” And our answer is, You’re damn right we care! We have to go to that same acre every day every year. Why do we want to ruin it, you knuckle-head? We want to preserve it.” And they are starting to—some of our strongest supporters now are environmentalist.

And part of this has come out of what we call this BMP program, Best Management Practices. It’s a state program. The growers work out their best management practices. They go over it. They hash it with the Department of Environmental Regulations and all of these guys. And when everybody’s happy it becomes a law.
Environmentalists are just elated that we would do that. Simple little things like putting gates on culverts so when water is running you stop it and allow your sediment to settle, before it all gets out. In some cases you build a pound—an area—diked off area full of reeds and you run the water through it and the reeds filter the nutrients and the clean the water. And—uh—uh—we’ve endorsed that kind of program.

Well—okay—the state is spending millions and millions of dollars to make a reservoir here at LaBelle. I don’t know if you’ve heard that or not, that ten thousand acre reservoir. They bought the land for too much. Now they’ve decided it’s porous and they are going to have to line it. So they’ll have twenty five thousand dollars or more per acre in it before it’s able to hold water. Okay, I’ve got several ponds out in my grove—“Hey I’ll hold water. Let’s talk about it. I can put a dike around there and a culvert and a pump and I can do this. What can you pay me? What’s it worth to you for an acre-inch to be held? Well pay me for it! It’s cheaper than spending all of this money on damn projects.” That’s another way that we can develop farm land into other profitable ways.

Mansfield: It seems like you’d still be having a hard time confronting the real estate developers.

Todd: Their interest is one way. And you know, their deal is very set. We at least a section. We can operate with out a section ‘cause we go to have a hundred and eighty acres in a golf course. Then our real profitable homes will be around that. Then our condos will be behind that. And a little shopping center and so forth.”

So now we’re saying, “Okay, buddy, every bit of waste produced on there stays on it and your water runs out clean. Now how are you going to do that?” Well they are going to do it one of two ways. They’re going to hire somebody to take it. Well they’re going to hire somebody to take it. So is it going to be some dump deal somewhere or is it going to be some agricultural land around? And what would the people living there prefer? And I’ll guarantee you they will prefer the [agriculture].

Mansfield: I’m sure they would prefer the [agriculture], but often developers can only see the bottom line.
Todd: Well that’s why you have to get the state involved. Like on your ag-exemptions you can put one house per five acres. Well that’ not development you know. That means the owner can go build him a house there or whatever.

Collier [County] has worked hard on this, where you swap values for environmental deals. And maybe if I have some extra land and you want to build more developments I will give you some of my environmental credits so you can do your. In other words we can swap. The deal is how will we treat nature in the whole?

That wasn’t there five years ago, believe me. And it’s got to have got to have the cooperation of the county commissioners who, for the most part are not Floridians now. And a lot of them have this attitude, “Well I here. Let’s close the gate.” And I’m glad they have that attitude. I hope they all think that way.

I lived in Martin County for five years and Martin County used to have this deal where you can do whatever you want to do, but it ain’t going to be over four stories high. When you go south to Palm Beach, you don’t have somebody tell you where the county line is.

Mansfield: Well that sounds like a good place to conclude. But I’ve been throwing questions at you for the past hour, is there anything you want to tell me that I haven’t asked about?

Todd: I think there is a developing attitude in how we preserve ag-land. It’s a very new concept. It’s starting on how you handle development and how do you handle environmental problems. But it hasn’t really gotten anchored in how do you handle waste products and how do you handle water. I think this water storage is going to be a very, very profitable deal for landowners.

Remember it’s not a—it’s just a deal of if he can sell that damn land at a tremendous profit, you got to give him some insinuative to want to keep it. And simply storing water out on the pasture, for “X” number of dollars can be a deal. So it’s a new deal that’s just beginning to get going. I know of no other deal that’s as advanced as this North St. Lucie project. Which is what they are thinking about, “How do we induce
farmers to stay in farming?” And um—um—um—it’s going to be a very interesting program. We’re going to dump a lot of this stuff on the people. Probably the first time some of them will have heard it in this area.

We got a fellow coming in from Iowa. We got a guy coming in from Atlanta that’s experienced in these things. We try to bring in speakers they don’t see. We got an environmentalist that’s going to lead off the program. Ten years ago if I’d set up an environmentalist to lead it off, I’d probably been tarred and feathered. But these are our friends now. They realize if we’re going to preserve nature it’s got to be with the farmers.

Mansfield: Well let’s hope—I wish you all a lot of luck. It think it’s important. And I want to remind you that the information you’ve shared with me will be deposited in the Special Collections of the University of South Florida’s library. And in order for scholars to have access to this interview, we need you permission.

Todd: Sure!

Mansfield: Also I’ve been photographing everybody I’ve interviewed. Do you mind if I take your picture?

Todd: No not at all.

Mansfield: Okay. Let me again say thanks for talking with me and I’ll shut this think off. Well before I shut this off, let me ask you this, who else can I talk to? Who would be some people you recommend I interview?

Todd: [pauses] Who have you done in the “big”?

Mansfield: Shoot, I will cut this off.

[End of interview.]