CELIA BARSS
Woodland Gardens Organic Farm – Winterville, Georgia
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Date: August 1, 2013
Location: Woodland Gardens Organic Farm, Winterville, Georgia
Interviewer: Sara Wood
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
Length: One hour, three minutes
Project: Women at Work in Georgia

[Begin Celia Barss Interview]

00:00:01

Sara Wood: And I'm just going to introduce you for the tape.

00:00:04

Celia Barss: That's probably going to bug you, right, if all those noises—? I'm just used to it.

00:00:17

SW: Okay; so let's try this. Okay; so today is August 1, 2013 and I'm sitting her with Celia Barss at Woodland Gardens Organic Farm and we're in Winterville, Georgia. This is Sara Wood and Celia I'm going to go ahead and have you say hi and introduce yourself for the tape.

00:00:38

CB: Hi; I'm—

00:00:42

SW: [*Background Noise*] Should we leave it open? Would that—?

00:00:44

CB: The problem is—is like at a certain point everybody is going to come up and then—but you are hearing stuff so you need to decide, but anyways—.

00:00:52

SW: If it starts rattling—I know it might get annoying but maybe we can just have you like if you're in the middle of something just—.

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CB: Okay; we can also go upstairs if we need to. I've got a room up there if it ends up becoming too disruptive around here. I'm Celia Barss and I'm the Farm Manager at Woodland Gardens in Winterville, Georgia. I've been here for 10 years growing diversified produce and flowers for the Atlanta and Athens market.

00:01:17

SW: And Celia for the record, will you tell me your birth date?

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CB: November 17, 1975.

00:01:23

SW: Can you just start by telling me where you're from and where you grew up and—?

00:01:33

CB: I was born in Newfoundland and we didn't live there too long before we moved to Toronto. And after that my parents moved to Papua, New Guinea, where I spent the majority of my childhood. And then after that we moved to Baltimore, Maryland and I went to high school there. And after that I went back up to Canada and did my university education up in Ontario, and then after that in Quebec.

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SW: And what are your parents' names?

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CB: Martha Barss and Peter Barss.

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SW: So why did your family move around so much?

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CB: My parents were sort of part of the generation that wanted to make change I think in different places and they got—they, actually before I was born they lived in Angola, in Africa. And my dad was a physician and my mom was a teacher. And both in that case and in Papua, New Guinea they were—they were going to countries that were just opening up, you know, leaving their kind of colonial roots and they wanted—they were working with organizations to kind of help people sort of set up their own healthcare system or schools and that kind of thing, so—. They weren't missionaries or any—they were just professionals that enjoyed kind of doing that stuff at that time. **[*Laughs*]**

00:02:58

SW: What was that like for you to move around so much and to see your parents do that kind of work?

00:03:03

CB: Oh it was a really rich childhood. I think growing up sort of exposed to—to so many different cultures and ways of life just always helps you gain perspective in your own life and keeps you kind of grounded you know. I think I—in some ways, I—I didn't like that I didn't have any roots anywhere, you know and it's funny because now I farm, like you're so—you're rooted on a farm **[*Laughs*]** in so many ways as you're tied to this land to make your living. And maybe it's because—maybe it's because of that, you know but I wouldn't have wanted to have any other childhood you know.

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And it's certainly now while I'm rooted with the farm most of the time, I like to get out and travel if I can **[*Laughs*]**, whenever I can.

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SW: Did you intend—when—I don't know if this is something that you intended on doing, but did you have an interest in farming growing up or did you have relatives who farmed or anything?

00:04:07

CB: Yeah; I mean I'm probably five generations removed from farming at this point—definitely come from sort of a more academic family. No; I had no intention of farming or any idea. I didn't, you know—know farmers, wasn't exposed to it at all. I always did like gardening though. I remember from a pretty young age I loved you know being outside gardening and after I guess—well I mean even in high school, all my jobs were kind of working for gardening companies and stuff and I worked for one company for almost eight years, but mostly in

perennial ornamentals. And I got most interested in sustainable agriculture when I lived in Ecuador for a year in university and that's—that's where I began really thinking that I probably wanted to do something around sustainable food, but didn't quite know yet what that would be and certainly did not think it would be actually becoming a grower myself **[*Laughs*]** because I just thought oh maybe, I'm going to you know learn how people should be growing food and come here and tell them how they should be doing it [*laughs*].

00:05:19

And but you quickly kind of—I guess I did go back to school and study soil science and studied a lot about you know agriculture in developing areas but I quickly realized how much there was to do in my own you know—my own country and I was—realized it was going to be really hard for me to go abroad and tell people how they should be growing their own food when there's—you know there's so many problems here at home.

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And I guess slowly it just kind of—kind of came to me through my studies that one of the biggest issues that agriculture faces is you know there—the lack of people going into it as a profession. But at that point I was in agriculture school and a lot of people in agriculture school are from farming backgrounds. And they pretty much think—don't think anyone who didn't grow up on a farm could possibly farm. **[*Laughs*]** And so I was not going to breathe a word of this idea that maybe I would be someone that could farm. I—you know I was just—the idea came there, but it was—I ended up leaving and going out to UC [University of California] Santa Cruz to a place where it was a whole lot of people who didn't come from farming backgrounds who were interested in sort of small-scale, diversified farming systems, and it's really there when I gained the confidence to feel like, "okay, yeah. I can do this." Like there's a—a lot of people that came out of this program that have done it and with people who are in the same boat as I

am—not everyone wanted to be a farmer; a lot of people were going into education and that kind of thing, but—.

00:07:07

It was through that program that I really got sort of a core base and gained the confidence to feel like, "okay, I can go out and do this, so—."

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SW: Now did you—were you at UC Santa Cruz before you went to Ecuador?

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CB: No; it was actually a number of years later. I was in Ecuador in 1997—1997 yeah and I didn't go to Santa Cruz until 2002. So it was a long you know path to getting here. **[*Laughs*]**

00:07:40

SW: Yeah; I just wanted to back up and ask you, you mentioned, you know you started to get involved—or interested when you were in Ecuador. I'm wondering what made you decide to go to Ecuador to study and what was it—what was the experience like that made you turn this corner?

00:07:55

CB: Yeah; I was studying international development and anthropology so I think I went there as part of my studies, so as an interest in you know culture and seeing how a country is going through the development process. And while there I had an internship with an organization focused around sustainable farming in communities that are—you know have gone through the

Green Revolution. They're—they have been—you know came out of the hacienda system, divided up, went through the Green Revolution, and have small—people have smaller and smaller chunks of land to work with. They depleted all their soils through the Green Revolution. And then they are breaking it up through generations on top of that so they're using a—you know over—using it way too intensively. And so the group I was working with was trying to figure out ways to build soils and get people back farming on their small plots.

00:09:01

So that's where I got interested in kind of small systems, intensive farming systems. So I think there though I was still in the mindset, "oh, okay, I'm in—I'm in college. I come from an executive background." But I knew I wasn't a teacher and I knew—you know I knew I was—I loved being outside. Every single job I had—had been—you know actually paying was **[*Laughs*]**—was an outside job. And I really loved working with my hands. I love plants and so it just slowly came together I think through my gaining confidence that—that would be an okay path for me to take to kind of make my living off of working the land and working with my hands and certainly your mind is very involved in a small diversified farming system. But sorry—my husband just arrived, sorry.

[*Interviewer's note: we move the interview upstairs because Ms. Barss's office was getting a little too noisy for the recording.]*

00:10:00

SW: It's pretty—

00:10:00

CB: Pretty good?

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SW: Okay; so you were—we were talking about being in Ecuador and could you just say where you went to school and where you were in Ecuador?

00:10:27

CB: Oh okay, yeah so I went to Trent University which is in Ontario in Canada and I lived in two places in Ecuador, one is a small town outside of Quito where I did my internship and this work I'm talking about that got me interested in sustainable agriculture was near Otavalo which is up in the mountains, sort of—about three hours from the capital, so working with indigenous communities up there, so—.

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SW: And so when you came back did you—you came back to the States after—?

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CB: No; I came back and I finished my degree at Trent and at that point like all my fellow graduates became quite depressed because we had seen the issue with sort of this—the issue of developmental organizations working in developing countries, this pattern of projects starting, never getting completed, realized oh, we're part of—are we part of the problem, you know maybe—you know just didn't know—. Honestly I think all of us **[*Laughs*]** stayed away from development because we ended up feeling like maybe we were a—would become a larger part of the problem working in development than a benefit.

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So I certainly think there's a lot of good work that gets done also, but it's sort of a difficult position to be in definitely. So at that point it's like re-evaluate, "okay what do I really want? I'm—here I am a social science major; what I want is like a skill of some sort, like something I can do that you know to help." I wanted to help in some way to—you know give back to society in some way. So you know I worked for a few years you know in horticulture. I was taking care of the gardens and stuff and then decided to go back to school and study soil science. And not knowing exactly where that would take me, okay I thought, "maybe—maybe I'll find projects that I feel really good about." You know and I loved Latin America and thought I could get back down there and do work I felt good about.

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But that's when I started getting really interested in sustainable agriculture in North America and that—that was while I was at McGill University in Quebec at the Ag (Agriculture) School there. And it was—the light bulb that happened; I was taking classes in you know around ecological farming systems and stuff but I went to—we had an ecological farming library actually that was quite unique to have that but I walked in and there was a—sort of a bulletin board thing and I saw this brochure for the program out at UC Santa Cruz that I ended up doing. And I mean that very day I was like, "This is what I'm going to do."

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I remember I had one other friend that was kind of in the same boat as me. We were kind of more urban, you know people that thought we liked farmers and farming and all that and you know we were really interested in it, and but we were too embarrassed to admit that that's what we wanted to do. And I looked at her and I said, "Have you heard of this program?" And she said, "Oh yeah, yeah. They've got an amazing reputation." And I was like, "I think this is what

I'm going to do. I—I just can't keep twiddling my thumbs here in school. I'm not getting the experience I—you know I want—now I need hands-on, so I've got some of this like you know schooling behind, the academic side behind and understanding you know growing systems and stuff, but I'm not learning how to grow stuff here. **[*Laughs*]** I mean we're doing experiments in the lab. I need to get out there and so I was like I'm going to do this."

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And I pretty much applied within you know a couple months and I left that spring. I left McGill and went there and just haven't really turned back since then. You know I left there and just started getting jobs on farms. I think what's hard is you're from—my background is you don't have—you don't come from a farming family and you don't have access to land and I also didn't have a trust fund to help me **[*Laughs*]** buy land, so I think everyone dreams of having their own farm you know because we're a pretty independent-minded people in general—most farmers that I know. So the idea of like owning your own land and running your own you know farming operation is definitely where everyone you know starts out thinking they're going to end up. But then the reality sets in of, "Wow, land is really, really expensive and you make no money farming." **[*Laughs*]**

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So what's neat nowadays is that there's a lot of people that do own land that don't want to farm it themselves but want to see it used for farming and so that's sort of how I've ended up you know being able to farm is by working land for—for other people that don't want to work it themselves.

00:15:44

So I feel you know sometimes I think, "Oh, it would be nice to have my own place," but I'm—I've come to terms with the—the reality and you know really I want to just grow good

food and make a living off of it and not be struggling my entire life which is what I would be doing if I—if I had to buy land of my own. So this opportunity just—I feel grateful to have it, so—. Yeah; that's how I'm doing what I'm doing. **[*Laughs*]**

00:16:21

SW: I'm just—I have a couple questions. When you—I guess in your programs especially you know this—it was sustainable agriculture at UC Santa Cruz, were there—how many other women were in the program? Was it—?

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CB: That's a pretty unique program. It's—it's not—it's—it's more of an apprenticeship program, so it's a combined academic and experiential—they call it an apprenticeship, so yes; you do—we did do some you know bookish stuff but we did a lot of hands-on out in the garden working on the farm. They have working gardens and farms.

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So there it's pretty, you know, it's not sort of your conventional setting. There were a lot of women. I would say there were more women than men in that program or maybe 50/50; I can't remember but it was about half and half but everyone was there for a different reason. So not everyone was—not everyone had the goal of becoming a grower; some people wanted to do ag-education. Some people—ad-advocacy—that kind of stuff; yeah.

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SW: And I know you mentioned a little bit about this but I just want to ask you again in a different way I guess. What—you found out about the program at UC Santa Cruz but at what moment did you decide "I want to grow; I want to grow food," and why that?

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CB: It—why that?

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SW: And when? **[*Laughs*]**

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CB: Yeah; it—it was certainly while I was at McGill. I knew that I needed to be doing work outside and I needed to be growing stuff and I didn't I guess fulfill—feel fulfilled just growing ornamentals. While I enjoyed it, I just didn't think I wanted to make that my life work. But when I started to learn about growing food and that there was a need for more people to grow food sustainably I think that was the moment like while I was at McGill like they—we actually need more people to be doing this work. I think I can grow. I know I can work outside long hours to do that. You know I knew I could do that side of the thing. It was whether I would then be able to translate that into making a living.

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So it was definitely while I was at McGill and one of my classes I had a really excellent teacher there who brought in—part of the course was we visited some farms but she brought in a lot of farmers also because it would be winter so there wasn't—this is Canada so winters were

long but we would analyze their farming system. She was pretty unique that way at McGill but the whole course was kind of built around looking at these different farms, all sustainable farms, all different scales you know. There's 3,000-acre grain farms, you know five-acres CSA [Community-supported agriculture] veggie farms, and just understanding sort of their systems, understanding how they made a living, and all this. So I felt like I got exposed to a lot of different systems there and it was still kind of very like, "Okay, they're—they're doing it." But I think I—by looking at those farming systems was like okay; I—I can relate most to the five-acre diversified market gardener because he came from the background I did. And I come—you know I had been doing like some ornamental horticulture stuff and I definitely—you know smaller scale was definitely—seemed more approachable and doable when you don't come from a large-scale farming background. And also that's what I would—was interested in—out of my time I spent in Ecuador was these small-scale intensive systems where you're using land quite intensively to—and then keeping sort of a larger area protected, so that's—that's when—that's probably when it all came together. And then it was like, "Okay, how do I go about making this happen?" **[*Laughs*]**

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So I went out to California to get kind of more hands-on training.

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SW: And then what happened when you left? Did you go—did you start farming land?

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CB: After I left Santa Cruz I left with another friend of mine who completed the program and we moved to Pennsylvania and we—we did what we were told not to do. But we started a farm

from the ground up, a CSA farm out of a conventional corn field, basically. And you know what made it possible was that it was the group of consumers that wanted it that initiated the—you know, the project and then found us to come and help to make it happen. So without their support it never would have happened. But we were a CSA model right from the start and we were definitely strongly advised not to start out farming doing a CSA because it's an easy way to—to lose people's **[*Laughs*]** um, faith in you as a farmer if your first season out you're—you know you've got all their money and then you you're going to make a lot of mistakes.

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So but this is the model that they wanted and it's what fueled the project. It was the only way to get the money upfront to—to make it happen. And even the CSA shares obviously didn't cover what it cost to get that farm going but it was—it took a lot of grants and that kind of stuff. It was definitely a big—it was a nonprofit setup. But it was—it was a real important learning experience for me because I, you know, was involved in starting a place from the ground up so getting something going from you know putting in wells, getting electric hooked up, I mean literally it was an empty field and we had to put in you know a greenhouse, our office was, you know, a—one of those little sheds you buy at Lowes and—and put it together like it's ten-by-ten. I think that was our office and it had a couple fridges in it and it also was the tool shed and it was everything you know and not—and I had built that ten-by-ten packaged kit from Lowes in desperation because we needed a covered space.

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And you know just buying every single thing we needed to start a farm we did it within about four months **[*Laughs*]** and started a growing season. And we made it through but it was definitely a burn out experience. I—you know we—it was—it took four of us but I—there were four of us paid to do—to work the farm but it took a lot of you know volunteer time on the—

from the people involved and it took making a lot of mistakes, but they kind of had a set of values that I really agreed with and have stuck with me. They were committed to paying the people that worked the land, which was—I think is very important because it's—you've got to pay people to get the true cost of your food. They you know provided us health insurance, all things I realized you know—I realized afterwards wow; these are really hard things to do knowing how hard it is to make a living farming.

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But some of those values have stuck with me and I've tried to incorporate them in other farming places I've gone. But it was—it was—yeah the best thing about it was I learned how to get a place up off the ground really fast on sort of doing just getting by, you know just the basics of what you needed. And—and actually everyone was happy with their shares. I think we were all about to you know shoot each other at the end of the season, **[*Laughs*]** but I left there at the end of the season, maybe because of that, but also for personal reasons. I wanted to come down here to the Athens area and I just started seeking out other farming experiences down here.

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SW: What was the name of the farm and where was it in Pennsylvania?

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CB: It was called Penny Pack Farm and it's in Horsham, Pennsylvania, just north of Philadelphia.

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SW: And it's still there?

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CB: Yeah; it's still there, yeah. I think it's a much larger even—it's still a CSA farm. I think they do some farmers' markets also. It's still going and I was really only there for the first year. My you know friend who was—left California with to start it, she stayed for a number of years but they've switched managers there also, so—. But it's still going which is really neat.

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SW: And what year were you there?

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CB: I was there in 2003; yeah.

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SW: And you said decided to move down here to the Athens area. What drew you to this part of the country?

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CB: You can't include this, it was my ex-boyfriend. **[*Laughs*]** Anyway he was in graduate school here, so it was sort of you know—came here, but you can maybe include this—the rest of this. I think I was reluctant to come to the South. It was an area of the country I was very you know not familiar with. It felt—it felt pretty distant from my own background. But it's—it's—I've really come to love the South a great deal. Actually I'm here—I'm still here after twelve years, I think seven of which I was saying every year I was going to leave because I wanted to be

closer to my family, but the South has just such a rich culture around—around food and rural life. And that's kind of closer to many more people I think because so many people are—or the people are a little more connected to the land, I guess more rural-based for longer I think. So maybe—maybe that's—that's what it is, but there's definitely a very unique culture around food that I've really come to appreciate and a certain closeness to the land that I think not every—I think—I think you know a lot of people value it in different you know parts of the country but maybe it just is people, I don't know have lived closer to that type of rural existence that's sort of closer to more people.

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SW: And when you came to Athens, I mean you've kind of seen so many different parts of the world and you've farmed in—on the West Coast or you've learned out there and you were in Pennsylvania and you were in Ecuador. I mean what are some of the differences that you came across when you started farming here in this area compared to the other places you've been?

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CB: Well initially I felt like there wasn't a huge community around this type of small-scale farming, small-scale sustainable farming because there weren't very many people doing it in Georgia, really, when I got here. And so you know I—I've kind of craved a little bit more of a community around it but it's grown really pretty fast in the last you know seven or eight years, really. So in a way I felt like coming to the South was—I didn't go to the developing world but the South was sort of the area that was the farthest behind as—in the area—compared to the areas I had been in sustainable agriculture like, there were way fewer farms here than anywhere and so in a way I could make more of an impact here and in—that's not why I was here but in—

in many ways I feel like I've had more impact just in—with my farm here than I might have in some—some other areas.

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But I forgot the beginning of the question. **[*Laughs*]**

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SW: Oh just in terms of you know just the differences and what it was like to farm—?

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CB: The differences, yeah; so the lack of the community or there's a big lack—lack of community but there's a big need for more sustainable farmers down here but the hardest part is it's a pretty harsh growing environment.

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SW: Can you talk a little bit about that?

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CB: Yeah, it's almost—it's like a subtropical climate so you have a lot of pest and disease pressure in—in this type of environment because we don't have you know winters to—to kill off pests and then we have, this is an environment that promotes disease **[*Laughs*]**. Disease loves it here with all the humidity. And on top of that the—the soil is just—you know we don't have deep, rich soils, we—you know the South has very—you know very little top soil and it was depleted pretty quickly when they started farming intensively. And it's hard to build soil here because of the climate. So it's quite a challenging environment to farm in. But maybe I like that

challenge too, you know. So it—I think it's challenging for like a community initially but now that's really there, honestly for me, because I'm close to Atlanta. There's a lot going on now in Athens and then the challenge of the growing environment. Those are probably the big differences in the South in some of the areas I've lived in.

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SW: And so you came down here in—around 2004 does that sound—?

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CB: I came down in—yeah late 2003; yeah.

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SW: And did you come straight here to this particular piece of land?

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CB: No, I worked on one other farm before I came here. I think I—I burned out on this crew—working with this crew on a tough year and so I went to a small farm called Flat Rock Farm [in Atkinsville, Georgia] and helped a woman named Carol Nufur. She—she sort of was a hobby farmer and she had another job and she was trying to keep, you know, this hobby farm going. And I—she had—you know dreams of it becoming something bigger but still always had this other job and just stretched too many different directions. So I—I agreed to—I just wrote every farmer around, you know organic farmer I knew around from a list I was given, around Athens and I asked if they could pay someone you know to work for them. I made $7 an hour, but I

needed to make something, you know I was beyond being able to not make anything for my work.

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And actually—okay I won't go into that but so I just—I had written some people and asked if anyone was interested in having you know someone with my experiences and come work for them and if they could you know also offer me something in exchange for my labor. So she responded enthusiastically—really enthusiastically. So, and I kind of was ready for fewer people at that point. I had kind of burned out on our crazy season. I was like oh, "This will be better. I'll just most of the time I'll be by myself and what gets done will be what I can do and I don't have to deal with all these people." And it was—it was really—it was a good—good year; it was totally different. Obviously I went from, you know, more of a tractor/field scale system back down to gardening system, just by the time I had left there we had just over an acre, which is all you can really manage if you have—don't have a tractor and you're doing—using walk-behind equipment and your back and stuff.

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So I learned—I definitely learned a lot about that experience. I learned that I didn't think I could be doing that when I was sixty because it was back-breaking **[*Laughs*]** to not have any mechanized systems really and I learned that I did want to have—be working with more people and that I liked you know being able to produce a little bit more which you know working with a crew can bring. You know, working with a larger group of people you can produce more and you get sort of a community around the farm. So that you know led me to search for other jobs and the opening came here at Woodland Gardens to come on as the field manager to kind of grow their field scale system, so I've been here now for ten years.

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SW: So can you talk a little bit about the history of the land as far as you know like who owns the land and how—has this always been a farm and—?

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CB: Yeah; it's definitely I think each farm probably has its unique history. So the land is owned by Thomas Woodruff and Dock Epstein and they live on a property that backs onto it. And it went up for sale at one point and they bought it in hopes of keeping it from being developed and keeping it as farmland. At that point it was mostly in pasture, just hayed but from what I've been told it had, you know, been in corn and soy at one point and then at one point was probably—it had been, you know, in cotton like farther back. But there was nothing here obviously, it was just hay fields.

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So they really—and I was not here for that part. They had to do it from the ground up, build the infrastructure and I was very happy to not have to go through that process again **[*Laughs*]** after the first experience. Of course they invested in a much more substantial infrastructure than we had in my first experience. **[*Laughs*]** But when I got here they had already—they had built the big heated greenhouse and, you know, a couple of barn spaces and this main building which is our office and packing house which really kind of gives you everything you need to work out from. And by building the big heated greenhouse though it meant we had to be a year-round operation. So that sort of has dictated how I've had to make decisions on the—you know, for the farm because with this big heated space we've got to be using it in the winter months and it actually ended up working okay with some of my ideas of

what I wanted from a farm and that was to have—work with a group of people that could all make their living off of the farm also.

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We're fortunate because the owners don't make anything off of the farm business and they—they really—their only goal is to see the place be kept in agriculture and they do want to have it sustain itself though so it—there are definitely other challenges even though—I mean small-scale farming just doesn't make any money. They know that. They wanted a small diversified farm that's—the only person you know—any money they would have made is going to me to run it, so—they're not—but they're not running it day in and day out, so—. They—they recognize that so they're not looking to make any money off of it.

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They just wanted to see it—this type of system here. So and that's gone—you know I've been able to incorporate things I wanted which I started to say was you know having a crew that made their living off of it, so my goal has really been to try and have everyone make a living wage off of the farm, but it's—it hasn't, you know, come easy. It's meant constant production, like there's—you just can't ever kind of have any down time, because—. I mean you can have down time. I can have down time because I have a trained staff that can run things now if I take a week off, but you can never stop planting. You always have stuff going because you need to constantly have income coming in to support eight people off of this little land, really, it's only about ten acres that we're—we're growing off—growing on, so—.

00:37:56

SW: And can you—you told me this outside but just for the tape, the digital tape, how—so you farm on that many acres, but how big is the land itself?

00:38:05

CB: The whole farm is seventy acres; we cultivate about ten acres. The rest is you know either uncultivated open land or woods—a lot of it's woods, so it's seventy acres and we grow in ten.

00:38:23

SW: And I'm wondering from the moment you arrived here as the field Mmanager how have things changed for you personally and for the farm in the last ten years?

00:38:35

CB: Well the first seven years the farm was my life. It was everything and I kind of put every—you know my personal life definitely had—took a back burner to building up the farm business. And so it was sort of all I did. But at a certain point you **[*Laughs*]**—you realize there's more to life than just your job as—as—no matter how devoted you are to it, you need other things. So you know in a roundabout way I met my husband John [Cooper] through—I mean through friends we met. And he, I think it was a time where I was ready to, you know, commit the energy and time that it takes to make a relationship work also and he—he really loves the farm also. So he decided to move here and start working on the farm with me also because that was—he has a different background. I mean his is more in finance and business, but he—he also ran a plant nursery for several years and that was really where his—his passion was. But he helped us really a lot when we needed to make an expansion to be—our income had stagnated for several years and I knew we had to increase our income because our costs go up every year. But I have a harder time with sort of bigger picture stuff. I'm like—I'm good at like putting my head down and busting my butt to make **[*Laughs*]** stuff happen but we were in—we needed someone who

could you know could look bigger picture. And I also hate spending big chunks of money. And so we needed someone who could—who was better at vision—at having larger visions than my smaller you know square foot visions.

00:40:49

So he really—really came on at a time when—when we needed someone with his skills and background and he—he helped us expand the farm to where we are today. He likes project management and that kind of thing and I—I don't. And I don't like spending a lot of money and he likes spending money, if it means you end up with this big thing at the end, which we did. We got a whole you know new section of land we're growing in and some greenhouses.

00:41:25

But so John coming into my life and me realizing that I needed something other than just the farm and then after that we decided we wanted to have a family also, so that's been the biggest challenge is a year ago I had my son James.

00:42:07

SW: So can you talk about how things have changed for you since James was born with your work and being a mother and farming?

00:42:17

CB: Yeah; having a child—I mean John asks for my time and certainly I gave it as much as I could but I could say no sometimes, too but with a—when you have a child, you know, they're completely dependent on you. So it's a much more demanding relationship in your life, obviously. So it has been the greatest challenge, you know, it's incredibly rewarding but it's been very difficult for me in the last year balancing keeping the farm going and meeting all of my

son's needs. Like a lot of people thought oh, "You just strap him on your back and walk and do your job around the farm." But I can't do what I do with James strapped to my back. I have to work at a certain level of intensity to accomplish what I do in a day and James needs stuff all the time and I can't be—I can't be productive and do what I do if I'm constantly distracted by James. And so you know I—I compartmentalize in my life. I keep James at—you know at home and my husband does a lot of childcare and we have other people come in and help us so I can be here. And I swore I was going to work, you know, less so I could be with him more and that's definitely the idea everyone wants to work towards. It's just like any—you know I think a lot of jobs, you know, but with farming you're often weather dependent, season—you know seasonally dependent, so there's these really intense periods which we're just kind of finishing up now where you just kind of got to go hard because that's when you make—that's when you make your income.

00:44:17

And so it's this constant feeling like I'm you know I'm having—I'm compromising something if I'm leaving to go be with my son, I'm sometimes—I feel like I'm leaving my crew to do work that I feel I should be doing when they probably need to be getting home too. They've been super-understanding and supportive and never want me to feel bad about leaving to be with him. But then a lot of the times just feeling I'm here—I have to be here and then feeling guilty for not being with my son. So it's—with my son—so it's just an incredible balancing act and you know this idea of strapping the child on your back is I think a vision that I don't think many—I don't think I've ever seen a production farmer you know being able to do that. And now that I'm in that position I know—it's definitely not possible for me, like to accomplish what I need to do to make this business successful. You know so but to—obviously I got a child and I need to make an income to meet all of his needs, too, so like any career there's

you know it's a compromise but I think there's a certain level of intensity at times of the year that require me being away from him more than—than I would like.

00:45:46

But it's also forcing me to make changes and accept that it's—that's okay; like I can hire people to do—I have to come up with—figure out how to make the income but I can hire people to do some of the stuff that I was doing. Like, I went to the—we go to a year-round farmers' market. It's exhausting going to a farmers' market year-round, but I did it for years, but in the last year I've just decided I'm going every other farmers' market because I never had a weekend. And just being able to have those two days in a row I realized was you know monumental in our family life because you almost need a day to unwind and then another day to kind of do something fun and just get—get your life kind of together but do something fun as a family. So that was a big decision deciding I'm going to go to the farmers' market every other weekend and it's okay, someone else can do it and actually we have people that do it great and it hasn't you know compromised our market earnings or experience at all. People adjust and they understand and support. You just think it can't you know possibly do things differently.

00:47:08

So it's—you know I'm definitely in the stage—I'm definitely in the transition stage and still trying to figure out how to make it all work but there are changes like that—that I've made that are you know—that I know are possible. You just have to go against what you sometimes think everyone—you know think what a farmer role was—you know is supposed to be and it can be something different. We're already farming in a way that a lot of people didn't think you could farm so let's make it a lifestyle too that a lot of people didn't think you could have alongside farming, too.

00:47:44

But you just have to figure out how to make it all work, you know but it's okay to do it differently.

00:47:51

SW: Do you think—I mean you know I'm—and all the farmers are women, and so you talked about the challenges for you to be in the field and with your son. I mean, do you think that's an inevitable crossroad for the women who are farming if they decide to start a family? I mean it's so intensive to be out in the field and also I mean you talked about—I was just thinking about this when you were talking about it, I mean everybody has—you know women try to balance childcare and careers but this is—this is a lifestyle, you know, farming, it's like so many people are dependent on you for food and you're creating this lifestyle for other people, too, I mean is there extra pressure? I guess just asked you ten questions but—.

00:48:36

CB: That's okay, I mean I'm—you know I do think about that a lot because I think a lot of women feel a lot of pressure no matter what career they have you know and as a result I think a lot of women step back from their sort of more intense career paths in—in many areas. But it's great if you have a job that can be a little bit flex—you know has some flexibility built into it and understands that, you know, the demands of family life alongside, you know, whatever business or career you're in.

00:49:18

I—I don't know honestly whether farming is any more demanding than any other you know high-pressure situation—job situation because I see a lot of women struggling. But I know

it is very hard to—for me to be the main production manager because it's so weather and seasonally dependent and be a mom, you know.

00:49:50

SW: There are so many pressures, it seems like.

00:49:53

CB: I know, yeah there is. There's just—and it's you don't want to—you know there's just a certain level of intensity you have to be at during the main season and I hate—you carry it—I carry a certain amount of stress with me and I don't want it—you know that to—to be with me when I'm with him. So I try and—I try and separate it just so and—and you know I'm getting better at just walking away sometimes, and it is what it is and hopefully next season I came make up for that. **[*Laughs*]**

00:50:29

But I think—I think working and motherhood is—you know or parenthood is a balancing act probably for most jobs.

00:50:39

SW: Are there other challenges or unique qualities that you think you know it seems—you know there have been—there's a whole bunch of reports out there from like the USDA and even, you know, Georgia Organics where so many more women are farmers now, they've increased. And I'm wondering is there—are there other challenges or qualities, unique qualities that women bring to the field that you think that men might not necessarily bring to the field like just the unique quality of being a woman farmer as opposed—?

00:51:16

CB: Yeah; I know. I'm not sure. I think—I'm not sure if—I think farming this type of farming is—is about—all about multi-tasking, like you have to be able to fill a whole different—a lot of different roles, and we have so much diversity. So it's being able to manage all these different crops, manage your workers, manage the business, say wear all these different hats, a whole lot of different stuff going on, so you really—I think to be successful at it you need to be a multi-tasker or enjoy multi-tasking. And someone once told me that women are better multi-taskers. I really don't know if that's true or not. I—I do know in you know my relationship I'm definitely yeah much more of a multi-tasker. My husband likes doing—getting one thing done perfectly and done really well and getting it done on time and I like having—you know and he's **[*Laughs*]**—you know and then you move onto the next thing.

00:52:25

I—you know I've got—I like having tons of things going on always kind of at the edge of the—the time crunch and that for—for the production person here you—you kind of—that's what you've got to be good at to make it work. So I think multi-tasking if that's a more—more innate women I don't know but that's definitely—someone told me that, so that's definitely a huge part of it. **[*Laughs*]**

00:52:57

SW: I just want to ask you a couple quick things and then I'll—if you want to add anything, but before I forget, can you talk about who you're growing for here, what—how you distribute the food in terms of the CSA and restaurants?

00:53:10

CB: Uh-hm; yeah. We, okay, we sell at a farmers' market in Atlanta on Saturday mornings called Morningside Farmers' Market and that's year-round and we sell through—we call it a subscription box program here in Athens. It's comparable to a CSA, they just don't pay the entire sum upfront. They pay month-by-month. So they get a weekly box of what's in season and that's what we do here in Athens. And then we sell to a lot of restaurants both here in Athens and in Atlanta and that's probably about fifty percent of our sales.

00:53:51

SW: Can you talk about—can you talk about some of the restaurants or just name some of the restaurants?

00:53:56

CB: Yeah; some of our biggest supporters throughout the years have been Anne Quatrano, who has Bacchanalia, Floatway [Café], Abattoir. Hugh Acheson, who owns Five & Ten, owns part of The National, owns Empire State [South]—those have been two people extremely supportive of me through the years. We also sell to Linton Hopkins at Restaurant Eugene and Holeman & Finch [Public House]. We sell to so many—Watershed, we sell to The Optimist, JCT. Kitchen, Cakes and Ale in Decatur. Billy [Allin]'s been unbelievably supportive and a huge buyer of local stuff from us, Restaurant 246 [no. 246 in Decatur, GA]. Newer places that have opened up called Paper Plane and One Eared Stag, oh my god I could just go on, but—. You've got some. You probably want to promote them; let me think who else.

00:55:07

SW: No, that's good.

00:55:07

CB: Okay.

00:55:09

SW: And then—

00:55:10

CB: I don't want to leave anyone out because like if they hear anything—

00:55:14

SW: Well for the—for the sound—you know this is for the transcript too but for the soundslide I can just say restaurants—we've got about five minutes. And then so just—just for the tape, you have—can you talk about some of the produce you're growing right now and the bees and the chickens and things?

00:55:32

CB: Okay, well now it's basically end of—we call it end of summer even though it's the height of summer for a lot of people because we you know we're in the Deep South so we have an extremely long hot period. So for us towards the end of summer we are kind of towards the end of our tomato crop. We have squash, beans, corn, field peas—those are all the things we have out in the field. We have okra, sunchokes, we do a lot for restaurants, and then we also can grow a

fair number of different cucumbers, a lot of cantaloupes, watermelons, and then we have the perennial fruits finishing up like blueberries and blackberries, the figs just about to come in, then we'll move into persimmons but that's actually kind of later in the fall. But it's sort of a transition time also for us because we're getting ready to plant a lot of our fall crops. So in about three weeks we start planting all of our cool season crops for our—what I call our second spring, which is from October through December and we grow a lot of cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, lettuces, carrots, beets, radishes, all you know—all kinds of more cool weather-loving crops.

00:57:00

SW: Do you have a crop that you're—you feel the closest affinity to? I don't know if that exists for you but as a farmer, the one thing that you just—you can't help but love more than others?

00:57:12

CB: Yeah; there's the crops you like eating the most and then there's the crops you like—there are crops you like, you know growing the most and the ones that stimulate you the most like—because you like find them the greatest challenge. I put a lot of energy into—my own personal energy into growing lettuces and cut flowers right now, so I do a lot of—I think I spend a lot more of my mental energy on those crops just figuring out how to you know find new varieties and how to grow them better.

00:57:51

But probably my—so I would say probably those—maybe those are my—my two favorite ones to kind of figure out how to do better all the time. But, you know, my favorite one to eat would be you know the cantaloupes, like a good cantaloupe—you can't really beat that. Tomatoes, I mean a good tomato is great but I have a love/hate relationship with those because

they're quite challenging sometimes to grow, I find. So sometimes I hate them because they're hard to grow but then I love them when they do well and you have all these beautiful heirloom tomatoes and you can make a tomato sandwich and it's incredible. But I try to temper that so that I don't get too caught up in that because I have to remember all the work it took.

00:58:45

So those are probably—would be the ones I put a lot of mental energy into but there's always new stuff. I mean we're always trying new peppers, like right now is pepper season, so we have you know chefs interested in different types of peppers that are fun to—to try out or—. I really love trying—I—I personally like cool season stuff better. Like, I enjoy kind of growing that stuff a little bit more, the baby root vegetables and greens and stuff, so I always like trying to find a new green that they [chefs] like using. Chefs like herbs and edible flowers right now, too, so I've been enjoying exploring those you know growing different herbs and edible flowers a little bit more. But there's a lot of food trends with the restaurants, so I kind of try to keep up with them, so there's always something new. **[*Laughs*]**

00:59:40

SW: And just two more quick things. What kind—do you—do you get different reactions from people when they see that you're a woman farmer? I mean what kinds of reactions from people do you get from that?

00:59:53

CB: Mostly it's you don't—you know, "You don't look like a farmer." I'm not really sure what a farmer is supposed to look like, but yeah definitely I don't look like a farmer, definitely a new breed of farmer. But generally I feel like people—your work speaks for itself ultimately. And so

I find people to be quite respectful at this point. I mean, I've certainly in the beginning at the farm dealing with, you know, other trades that came out to help me repair stuff it was sometimes hard, to like, find the people that I could have a good working relationship with but now I've been here ten years, you know, I've found the plumber and the electrician that are comfortable with me being the one asking them to do stuff and writing the checks and that kind of thing. So and **[*Laughs*]**—so it takes some time, I think, but maybe it's just because I've been doing it long enough and now it's pretty—I'm pretty comfortable with it and I find people to be quite respectfully really.

01:01:03

SW: And what do you love most about farming?

01:01:07

CB: I love being able to work outside, growing things that people can take home and eat, and get as much satisfaction from it as I do when I take them home to eat every day. And I love—what I love here is being able to provide a workplace too for people that really love their jobs and can make enough to—to live off of it, too, so—. None of us are getting rich but we all like working outside and growing good food and it's a small, you know, crew, where you have an extra good crop of watermelon and you the crew loves that really or it's the bumper tomato year and the crew is all excited and I'm stressing because I have to figure out how to sell them all or—. **[*Laughs*]**

01:02:02

But I think working outside, growing food that people love and want, and working with a group of people that I really like.

01:02:15

SW: Celia I've taken a lot of your time and I think it's beyond lunchtime right now. Is there anything else you want to add before I turn the tape off?

01:02:24

CB: Hmm; no, I don't think so. **[*Laughs*]**

01:02:25

SW: Thank you for doing this today.

01:02:26

CB: Sure, yeah.

01:02:29

SW: Thanks for the figs.

01:02:30

CB: Oh yeah, you can go get more if you want. You only had a couple.

01:02:32

[End Celia Barss Interview]