

**HAL FIORE**  
**Last Resort Plantation – Greenwood, MS**

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Interviewer: Amy Evans Streeter  
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs  
Length: 1 hour, 25 minutes  
Project: Downtown Greenwood Farmers' Market

**[Begin Hal Fiore Interview]**

**00:00:02**

**Amy Evans Streeter:** This is Amy Evans Streeter for the Southern Foodways Alliance on Friday, September 9, 2011, in Greenwood, Mississippi, at TurnRow Books with Mr. Hal Fiore. And Hal, if I could get you to state your name and your occupation for the record?

**00:00:16**

**Hal Fiore:** Full name would be Harold Joseph Fiore, Jr. Occupation is a member of the Indolent Landowner Class.

**00:00:25**

**AES:** All right. And if I could get you to state your birth date for the record, as well.

**00:00:29**

**HF:** August 2, 1953, in Norfolk, Virginia.

**00:00:34**

**AES:** Okay. So you were born in Virginia?

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**HF:** My—I happened to be there because my dad was in the Navy.

**00:00:41**

**AES:** Okay. And then tell us about your family's roots here in the Mississippi Delta. We were talking about that a little bit.

**00:00:45**

**HF:** My great-grandfather was the first Mississippian here. I mean he was the first one to come down from Tennessee and be part of the settlement of this region of the country. His name is John Hodges Lucas, Dr. John Hodges Lucas, a Veteran of the Civil War, and he and my great-grandmother founded—they lived up around Schlater. What's now Schlater at the time was McNutt, Mississippi—and came down here when he was given some land east of Greenwood. I mean, sorry, west of Greenwood for a medical debt and built up a couple of plantations out there east of town. I'm sorry. I keep saying east—west of town. And that was just after the Civil War, so around the 1860s.

**00:01:45**

**AES:** Okay. And is that what eventually would become Last Resort Plantation?

**00:01:49**

**HF:** Yeah, half of it would eventually—yeah, the—the original land that he—he acquired was out there. It was—Clark land that he got from a widow named Clark, who was going back to Texas, who apparently, her husband had died somewhere out there. And he eventually was able to put more parcels of land together and had that one, and he also owned another plantation named—oh, land—Glen Burr Plantation, which is out north of Racetrack [Plantation].

**00:02:26**

**AES:** Okay. And do you have an idea of what size those plantations were—both of them?

**00:02:30**

**HF:** About 1,000 acres each.

**00:02:33**

**AES:** That sounds like a big medical debt.

**00:02:36**

**HF:** No, the first parcel was probably a much smaller piece of land.

**00:02:41**

**AES:** All right. So does your family have any stories about those early days in—in land owning and farming and what that was like?

**00:02:48**

**HF:** I'm sure many. In my mother's generation, they were not involved with the farm very much at all. They—they lived in town. My grandfather, my—who was married to my great-grandfather's daughter, was a banker here in town. But yeah, they bought this place, or he acquired the first land down here and apparently the story is, he went home and told his—told his—my great-grandmother, "Well, I just—I just acquired land west of Greenwood." I'm not even sure if it was called Greenwood at the time but, you know, down on—down south of us here.

**00:03:31**

And she said, “Well you better name it Last Resort because we may end up there.” And sure enough, that year, according to the story I heard, the winter waters did not recede until too late to get planted, and they only got 700 acres out of—700 bales of cotton out of 700 acres and had to give it up out—out there at McNutt and moved to—moved down here. So the—this was their last resort, I guess. **[Laughs]**

**00:04:00**

**AES:** So do you have an image of what the Delta looked like then, what this part of the Delta looked like back then?

**00:04:06**

**HF:** The stories I’ve heard is it was almost an un-tracked wilderness. My great-grandfather was a country doctor, a—like I said, a veteran surgeon from the [Nathan Bedford] Forrest Cavalry in the Civil War. And the stories I’ve heard is he did most of his work on horseback and would be gone for days at a time, tracking through mud and swamps and large expansive of undeveloped woods. If you’ve ever read [William] Faulkner, *The Big Woods* or anything like that, there was that—it was that country. It was before the railroads came in here and all the logging and everything that brought it out. And so the agriculture was on the higher sandy ridges. Last Resort, the main part of it or the—the headquarters and everything is on a sandy ridge right next to the Tallahatchie River that had been actually farmed by the prehistoric Indians. We had Indian mounds out there and one remaining where my great-grandfather and grandmother are buried, actually.

**00:05:06**

Your basic area has pot shards and things like that found out there, so it's been in agriculture production, you know, for longer than anybody can remember. And at least on the sandy ridges. And, of course, the area between the sandy ridges was gumbo clay and was only developed in the latter, you know—a lot of it, actually, only since World War II.

**00:05:33**

**AES:** So where do you think that your great-grandfather fits into the rest of the—the planter history in this area? Like would he—I guess that's just my question, not to complicate it anymore than that.

**00:05:45**

**HF:** Well, I do know that he had been involved in agriculture; he had gone west to California during the Gold Rush, came back and went to medical school. According to family history, he was aware that—or he was—I wouldn't call it a premonition or anything like that, but he was aware of the way the—the way the future was stacking up and he knew there was going to be a big war going on and everything and got into the medical profession as it existed at the time.

**00:06:16**

And but—but he had also always been involved in agriculture or for a long time had and so, you know, knew his way around that, too, obviously, and ended up owning two plantations.

**00:06:34**

He wasn't one of the real early pioneers—really came into the land, like I said, mostly after the Civil War. But you know, that place out there was—I have maps—or I have an aerial photo, a series of aerial photos of it from the 1940s, and there were probably forty families living out there, you know, sharecropper families and a cotton gin and a store, and it was, you know, a

small community all of its own that—that housed, you know, I don't know, maybe 100 people. And—and according to my aunt, one of my older aunts who grew up out there told me that they were nearly self-sufficient out there. They—I believe it was—it was sugar and white flour were the only things she said they really had to buy.

**00:07:33**

**AES:** Hmm. So lots of row crops in addition to—to maintain the family and feed family, vegetable gardens?

**00:07:39**

**HF:** Yeah, they had large vegetable gardens, but, yeah, mostly it was cotton.

**00:07:46**

**AES:** Hmm. So what—do you know—you were just saying that you don't even know if Greenwood was called Greenwood back then. Do you know anything about kind of the evolution of—of Greenwood in the early days and becoming the Cotton Capital of the World?

**00:07:58**

**HF:** Well in the 1830s I believe is when it—it you know, it—it starts around the early 1800s and the early 1830s, you heard about when it was called Williams Landing and all that. And it—a battle was fought here during the Civil War and it was—but it was pretty much just Leflore you know—the Leflore Plantation and a few loading piers and—and loading places around Point Leflore and you know that—I don't really know how—how developed it was up until, you know, the time after the Civil War and it got named Greenwood sometime after—after that, I

think. **[Laughs]** *[INTERVIEWER'S NOTE: The town of Greenwood was incorporated in 1844 and named after Choctaw Chief Greenwood Leflore.]*

**00:08:51**

**AES:** All right. Well I can figure all that out somewhere else. You don't—I don't have to put you on the spot for that. Well let's fast-forward to your connection to the Delta and your family land and a little bit about your background after you were born in Virginia. Where did you go from there?

**00:09:08**

**HF:** We traveled around because my—my father, who was a New Jersey second-generation Italian American, **[Laughs]** who by his—well mainly because of World War II, ended up in the Delta, it's a long story, but—

**00:09:28**

**AES:** Is there a short version that you can tell?

**00:09:29**

**HF:** He was—he in World War II in New Orleans—they let him loose in New Orleans and he ended up at—at Vanderbilt and had a summer job down here in the Delta and met my mother. I never knew him very well. He died when I was very young. Anyway, so I was raised—I was raised here after he—after he and my mother divorced when I was six, and then he died when I was nine.

**00:09:56**

I was raised here in Greenwood right—right over here in South Greenwood not—not far from where we’re sitting, from age six up until about thirteen. And then we moved to the [Mississippi] coast when I was thirteen. I went to military school down on the coast and did my high school years down there and a couple years of bagging around, trying to do college and not being very successful at it. And eventually stuck my thumb out one day and ended up in Northern California after a long circuitous—and crossed coast to coast a couple of times—trips. Ended up in Northern California and then established myself. Went to school, raised a family, had a career with the U.S. Forest Service and then eventually ended up back here, I guess.

**[Laughs]**

**00:10:53**

**AES:** Well tell me, I want to talk about lots of points along that timeline, but tell me about growing up here in Greenwood and what that was like.

**00:11:01**

**HF:** Well that would be a big subject. We ended up—we landed here, my brother and I, in—in South Greenwood in 1960. My early memories are the Civil Rights Movement was really heating up around that time. We were—one of my very first memories of being in Greenwood and here we are in Greenwood and this is a new place and everything—was they were having the Civil War Centennial and a big parade in town and all that. I wouldn’t—I wouldn’t have called it that at the time. I didn’t know what was going on. I just knew there was a big parade, and they dressed my little brother and I up in Confederate uniforms and put us in the back of a pickup truck with a couple little girls who were dressed in Southern Belle outfits—hoop skirts and all that.

00:11:52

And we were in a parade and, apparently, according to the newspaper clippings I have from that time, we were charter members of the Children of the Confederacy [*Laughs*]. So yeah, after that not—not long after that came the Civil Rights Movement, and I remember being told, “Don’t talk to any Yankee reporters.” [*Laughs*] I remember seeing black people down at the courthouse wearing—I remember they were black pegged pants and bright red shirts with their—with their shirttails out. [*Laughs*] You picture that beatnik look, and it looked really alien to us, of course.

00:12:37

And no Yankee reporter ever tried to talk to me, so I didn't have to worry about that. I kind of fell in with a rough crowd here in Greenwood in South Greenwood. We moved to North Greenwood at some point because they tried to get me away from that element, but I wouldn't really. And got into enough trouble, picked up by the police a couple of times—just really small stuff. We're talking, you know, eleven and twelve years old—that my family decided that it was best that I get out of there, and so they sent me to military school in Gulfport, Gulf Coast Military Academy.

00:13:20

And not long after that, my mother moved down with my little brother, and she got a job down on the coast as a draftsman. She had long been a draftsman but just couldn't make a living at it up here, and had a nice long career after that starting in her—oh, she was in her fifties at that time with a—with a couple of companies on the coast. And I went to high school down there.

00:13:52

**AES:** So when you were still in Greenwood, before you moved to the coast, were you here during any part of the Emmett Till murder or trial? Do you have any memories of that?

**00:14:00**

**HF:** I was not very aware of the Emmett Till—I remember hearing the name. I remember—this is kind of embarrassing to say, but I remember the name from a joke, a racist joke that was told at the time.

**00:14:17**

**AES:** So how—coming back to Mississippi, what has—has that been—what has that meant to you to come back to the Delta in Greenwood?

**00:14:28**

**HF:** Well, I originally came back to the coast. My little brother was dying of lung cancer in 2004, and I basically took a long leave of absence from the Forest Service and moved back to the coast to kind of help take care of him. While I was there, I met up with a couple of—mainly one old high school friend of mine who had been in the movie theater business for many years. We had been—we made films together and things like that in high school, and he had stayed with it on the technical side and knew some people that wanted to sell a movie theater in—in Gulfport. And I had just sold a house in Davis, California, at a large profit and had some money to invest. And we bought this movie theater. I bought the movie theater and made him and another person partners with me there. And it lasted four months and got wiped out by Hurricane Katrina. And I kicked around there for a while and, as is so often the story of my life, met a woman who had real strong ideas of what I ought to do with my life. And we ended up—up here in the

Mississippi Delta because I showed her that I had some land up here and was able to carve a few acres out of it and take it out of row crop production and put it into a small, I guess you'd call it a farm.

**00:15:59**

**AES:** So did you ever think that you'd come back to Mississippi—and your family land?

**00:16:03**

**HF:** You know, I guess—you know, yeah. I always thought there—there might be a chance that I'd come back to Mississippi. I always brought the kids back here in the summertime. This is—growing up in Davis, California, as far as they knew, the only two places in the world were Davis, California, and Greenwood, Mississippi, because this is where we always came for, you know, their summer vacations and everything.

**00:16:24**

But I always felt a certain connection to the Delta. You know, there is something about—nobody is going to believe this, but I used to get off the plane in Memphis or Jackson and feel the August humidity and go, “Oh, I'm home.” **[Laughs]** You know, so to me it's just like a warm hug. It actually feels good.

**00:16:52**

**AES:** So there is part of you that was still very connected to this place and coming home was a—always a possibility for you, then, somewhere, maybe?

**00:17:00**

**HF:** Yeah, almost kinesthetically connected. I mean it's just—when you grow up in a certain way, that's just the way life ought to feel, you know. Yeah, the summers are hot and they're supposed to be hot, you know.

**00:17:14**

**AES:** So do you think your thirty years in Northern California made that draw even stronger, that you were able to leave and then see the place from a distance and then come back?

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**HF:** I'm not sure if I caught the very last of that question but—

**00:17:26**

**AES:** Well, to be able to have an appreciation for the place that you're from by leaving and then seeing it differently and coming back?

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**HF:** Yeah, I see. Um, I suppose. There's something really nice about living in a place where you have, I don't know—I don't want to use a happening cliché word like roots or something like that, but where you can look at a piece of, you know, street corner and go, “Yeah. I used to deliver papers on that block, and I know every crack in the sidewalk,” you know. Or, “Yeah, my great-grandfather is buried,” you know, “right there.” *[Laughs]*

**00:18:16**

A lot of places don't have that nowadays and Northern California is—well Southern California is even worse, but California is a—is definitely that way for me. Now my kids—that's

their roots now. You know, that—that’s—they know their mother’s family better than they know mine, just like I knew my mother’s family better than I ever knew my father’s family. I know nothing about being an Italian American from New Jersey. You know, I don’t—I don’t know the first thing about that. People—people have met me and they say, “Hey, you know what—what’s—what makes good pasta?” I have no idea. **[Laughs]** You know, I know—you know my mother’s family.

**00:19:01**

**AES:** Did your family, being—your father being Italian American, did he ever have any interactions with any of the Sicilian immigrants in the Delta community?

**00:19:09**

**HF:** Not that I know of. My aunt used to tell me stories about the Sicilian peddlers. They used to come out to the plantation in their little horse-drawn carts where they made—that’s the only place—if it hadn’t been for them, I remember they would have never known what hard candy and things like that were. I mean as little kids, you know, I had no idea what it was like for adults except that their—the description I heard was they’d have a wagon. They would be laden down with everything from pots and pans to, you know, flour to—to whatever and that’s where the people on the plantation got a lot of their stuff.

**00:19:42**

**AES:** So, okay. So going back to your time in North Carolina and your time at UC Davis, you said you studied—I’m sorry. Did I say North Carolina—Northern California. I’m sorry. See how

scattered my mind is. So yeah, so tell me about your studies at U.C. Davis and the work you did for the Forest Service, if you don't mind.

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**HF:** I—by that time I had been to college at a couple of different places and I—I have to back up a little bit from—. I ended up in Northern California and ended up in Berkeley, California, and lived on the streets there for a while and kind of did the survival thing for a while. Went back to college. Oh that—that would have probably been about my third attempt at college, and it was unsuccessful too. I ended up in the theatrical stage business. I ended up as a stagehand for a theater in Berkeley, Zellerbach Auditorium on the U.C. Berkeley campus. And that led to a job with the Union—with the Stagehand Union, which I spent most of my time—three years with the Stagehand—with the San Francisco Opera.

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And hurt my back doing that. I'm trying to make this as short as possible. [*Laughs*] Hurt my back doing that and decided to go back to school. Fourth time, I guess, was a charm. I went back—I chose U.C. Davis because it had an agricultural department, and I always had this idea I might end up back, you know, on the family-owned land. So I thought, well, I might end up needing that information.

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And so I—I went back there in the College of Agriculture but didn't really go into production-type agriculture. I went in the soil and water resources. Got involved in the Environmental Movement in Northern California and worked for some environmental groups, worked as a volunteer for some and actually got paid a little bit working for one. And ended up working for the U.S. Forest Service. They went from being the big bad enemy of

environmentalism to me actually working for them. And worked on various—as a—as a hydrologist. My degree wasn't in hydrology. I had enough—had enough of the right courses that I qualified as a hydrologist and worked as a hydrologist on the El Dorado, Tahoe, Toiyabe, and Mendocino National Forests.

**00:22:14**

**AES:** Great. And did you enjoy that work?

**00:22:14**

**HF:** Oh, I loved it.

**00:22:16**

**AES:** What did you love about it?

**00:22:17**

**HF:** Being outside, being—being out—I moved up to it and once I got to a GS-11 [General Schedule pay plan, GS-11 is on the high end], I didn't spend as much time outside as I did—I would have liked to. But I—I actually loved the culture of the Forest Service. It was a great place to work. It was people who, you know, really cared about each other and were kind of embattled from both sides in a lot of ways.

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And I think the most part, even the ones that you like to kind of look down on and think they're not doing their—the best thing for the land, were—were people who sincerely were trying to do the best thing they could for the land and served the communities that they were part

of and were, like it or not, in charge of millions and millions of acres of the—of the nation's public land and trying to help make that a responsible, sustainable, long-term thing was—was a goal that I really felt—I could—I could buy into.

**00:23:18**

**AES:** So how has that experience served you, being back here in Mississippi, you know, being a steward of—of government land and then now being a steward of family land?

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**HF:** Well that—that's it, you know. I'm—I'm—I went from being a very, very small fish in a huge pond to being a—a pretty large fish on a much smaller pond [*Laughs*], a puddle, if you will. But even as—even as a large fish, I'm finding I don't have as much leeway to really make things change as I'd like to. It's—it's a long slow process. It's going to take generational work to make it happen and, you know, we may not have generations to make it—to make it happen.

**00:24:05**

My education and background were all about studying the physics and the biology and the—the long-term soil productivity and that—and those sorts of issues that are just now barely being addressed on the agricultural scene. I'm—I'm probably not ever going to be a real successful farmer. I'm finding that's just, you know, maybe more than I can ever do. But I am interested in the policy questions and how—what can I do as an activist sort of person to make that happen and sustainability, in my opinion, is—is just the question of our age. And I'm—I don't know. I'm mostly just taking stock now in trying to see what—what I can do to make that happen.

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**AES:** So what—remind me again of what year you came back to Greenwood and your family’s land.

00:24:57

**HF:** I got back here in 2007.

00:25:00

**AES:** Okay. And that was the same year that the Farmers’ Market started up, is that right?

00:25:04

**HF:** Pretty much, yeah. Yeah, I was hanging out here when the—when the woman who had—who had [*Laughs*] sort of convinced me to come up here stopped being a part of my life. I found myself hanging up out at—hanging out here at the bookstore, TurnRow Bookstore. And I just looked over one day and was—I’d bring my computer in here and get online because I didn’t have a connection out there on the farm. And I looked over and I saw an easel and it said—it was an agenda and notes from some meetings that had been held for a Farmers’ Market, and I didn’t know who Jamie or Kelly [Kornegay, who own the bookstore] were or anybody—any of those people. And I—I knew Jamie owned a business, and I said, “Hey, what’s this farmers’ market thing about?” And he said, “Oh, well we’re trying to start a farmers’ market.” And I said, “Well, that would be a cool thing. I think that would be really cool.”

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I had lived in cities that had really nice farmers’ markets in Northern California and just got involved with it. I guess I came to some of the very first ones and didn’t do anything but walk

around and buy something, you know. And eventually, one of the—the person who was managing it at the time, Tommy—Tommy Miller and his wife had a booth there that, the regular Farmers’ Market table, and they said, “Well, if you have anything, bring it on down and you can sell it right here out of this table.” And I just happened to have—oh, I don’t know, maybe a bushel of cucumbers that I had produced in my garden or was—they were producing at such a rate that I’d be pretty sure that I’d have them there next week. So I just brought some down, and I actually sold them, and I went, “Wow, that was a cool experience.” **[Laughs]** And so I started bringing stuff down and selling it. And eventually had enough stuff that a couple of us, Jamie Kornegay and Mike McClellan and I all decided we had enough stuff to have our own table and started selling stuff out of our table.

**00:27:13**

**AES:** Yeah. And I understand that y'all have a name for your collective, as it were.

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**HF:** Well it—I jokingly said we ought to call ourselves Three Guys Who Grow Stuff, and we did that for about the first year. It didn't last, though. I mean by the second year it had gotten sort of passed around and people decided that—that was a great thing and it made it into a couple of news stories and things like that. But really, Mike—Mike produced bagged-lettuce that he sold at the Farmers’ Market, and it got really popular with it but decided early on that the Farmers’ Market was a low-return venue for him and could do better selling to a couple of local restaurants.

**00:27:55**

And Jamie, you know—Jamie is about the bookstore and he—he—and so it really was just pretty much, after pretty early in the second year, it was just me, pretty much.

**00:28:09**

**AES:** So I want to ask you if—when the Farmers’ Market started and you came back in 2007, had you already carved out the five acres that you wanted to farm outside of—on your own outside of the rest of the family land? Had that already happened?

**00:28:23**

**HF:** Yes.

**00:28:25**

**AES:** Okay. So you knew that you wanted to grow things as soon as you came back?

**00:28:28**

**HF:** Yeah. You know, my idea was not to grow vegetables. In fact, I never—I never wanted to grow vegetables. I never—that’s what kept me out of agriculture when I was at U.C. Davis is I looked around and I said, “Well, unless you’re into growing and made large-scale row-crop stuff or viticulture or a few of the other small specialty—specialty fields that they offered there, it was vegetables. And I—I am really, really not interested in growing vegetables.” I mean vegetables are a lot of hard work and not a whole lot of return and they don’t really—if you’re a big picture idea guy like I am, they’re not going to save the world, in a sense. Everybody can grow vegetables in their own backyard, and they ought to and there are some people like Hallie [Streater] and Brenda [Glenn] and them who ought to be—you know, that a lot of people can buy

their vegetables from, if they're not going to grow their own and get good local stuff. But civilization rises or falls on grains and meat and other large-scale commodities like that. And if we don't turn those questions around, we're not going to solve this thing.

**00:29:41**

You know, if a few hippies grow vegetables, it's not going to change the world. So it was never my intention to grow vegetables out there. My intention was to carve out a small place that I could live. The woman I was with at the time wanted to grow herbs—had a little herbal business and thought that was a really cool idea, and I liked the idea of medicinal and things like that. And I had been in love with this idea ever since I had—in the [19]70s or—well, I guess it was probably the '80s I had heard about Joel Salatin and the whole pasture-raised poultry thing. And that was my idea: I wanted to grow pasture-raised poultry.

**00:30:18**

But we had a little kitchen garden, and I got started selling cucumbers at Tommy's booth at the Market, and the next thing I knew, I'm selling vegetables at the Downtown Greenwood Farmers' Market. And the next thing I know, everybody thinks I'm a vegetable grower at the Downtown Greenwood Farmers' Market. **[Laughs]** So hopefully my resounding lack of success at that this year has maybe turned people away from that idea.

**00:30:45**

**AES:** Well tell me, you know, you're saying that if—if, you know, a few hippies are growing vegetables in the yard, it's not going to save the world. What do you think, you know, the little microcosm that is Greenwood and the local story here, what do you think the Farmers' Market and a bunch of people selling vegetables means for this town?

00:31:02

**HF:** Well first of all, vegetables are real important. Vegetables are, you know—they're vitamins and fiber and minerals and all the good things that people really need in their food. They also add, oh, you know, something worth adding to grains and beans, which is what we'd all be living on if we, you know, didn't have that.

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So it's not a bad thing. It's—it's, you know, it's a focus. It's what people, you know, think about when they think about local agriculture and—and local food and, you know, people go down to the Delta Bistro [restaurant in Greenwood], and they're not interested in how have you done corn any better than anybody else. They're interested in okra and—and fried green tomatoes and all these supposedly Southernisms.

00:31:57

So I'm not really quite sure where I'm going with this. Nothing wrong with vegetables and God bless them, and I wish the best on everybody about that. But what I'm about is long-term sustainability. And I could spend another hour sitting here talking to you about that whole question. And I may attempt the *Readers Digest* version of it, but—

00:32:31

**AES:** Yeah, do.

00:32:33

**HF:** Do? [*Laughs*]

00:32:33

**AES:** Yeah.

**00:32:34**

**HF:** Okay. Well, think about sustainability for a second. Everybody agrees that it's real important. I mean sustainability, what is that? I mean it's just become the buzzword. It's become, you know, one of the great—there are—most of the major land grant universities have research programs aimed at sustainability. Branches of the Department of Agriculture are starting to look at this whole question of sustainability, the think tanks, the—the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, they're—everybody gives sustainability this—this kind of—oh, isn't that a groovy thing? Yes, we ought to do that idea, but nobody really thinks about what that means. That means—sustainability is the opposite of not sustainability and—and not sustainability means you can't do that for any length of time. And that's pretty much, if you talk to almost anybody, you know, is our—is our current agricultural system sustainable? Anybody who really knows anything is probably going to say, "Well, no." And I can give you all kinds of reasons for that: energy, cheap fossil fuels, which the whole thing is built on, the depletion of soil. You know, there's a huge science in the rate of production of soil and what it takes to make soil productive over the long-term. And we know that we're depleting it at a much faster rate than it's been produced.

**00:34:04**

The inputs to go into making soil happen, you know the fertility and everything, the know-how, the knowledge of how to make things grow without putting all these huge technological and—and fossil fuel-derived inputs into them, we're losing all that stuff. And—and so sustainability isn't this—this nice luxury that, you know, gee, it would be nice if we had that, and it'd be cool, if you know—it'd be groovy. You'd be kind of, you know—we could all

shop at Whole Foods and have, you know, no pesticides in our food and—and raise our children, you know, in the cleanest way possible and everything like that. But that’s not really what sustainability about—is about. Sustainability is about how are we going to keep six and a half billion people living on the earth? And now they’re saying, well, you know, twelve billion by 2050 or something like that. How is that going to happen?

**00:35:06**

And almost nobody is really looking at those questions. Some people in the academic world are kind of looking at it and studying it, but nobody in the world is doing anything about it.

**00:35:20**

**AES:** So what do you think that means in the context of the Delta? Because, you know, we were talking earlier about how, you know, your family land is all being planted in GMO [Genetically Modified Organism] corn and soybeans, and here you are with five acres of vegetables? Is there—like have—have you reconciled that in your own mind or what that means or what the future of—of your family’s property is?

**00:35:39**

**HF:** Well, it’s a work in progress, let’s say. I’m a person with pretty radical ideas in a lot of ways. But I’m not a radical person, if you know what that means. I’m not a person who is going to jump in and say, “We’ve got to change the world right now.” Because I’m old enough—I’m fifty-eight years old, and I know that’s not going to happen. And if we stopped producing those crops out there on my land right now and all the other land in the Delta and all the other land in the Midwest and all the places where those things are being done, billions of people would starve

to death next year. And so no, I'm not saying we need to stop what we're doing right now. We need to figure out how we're going to do it in the next fifty years, the next 100 years, in the next five years, maybe.

**00:36:26**

It's—yeah, it is something that requires reconciliation because I believe that our—that our timeline is a lot shorter than people think. I've lived long enough that I know that changes happen faster than you think; they don't seem to be happening quickly, but when you look back over thirty years, wow, we've moved from a completely different way of doing things to—to a new way of doing things. GMO crops were unknown. I mean they were brand new in the '80s when I was at Davis. You know, in fact, they were—they were just in the conceptual design. Now some 98-percent or something like that of the corn grown in this country is grown from about two or three seed stocks, two or three genetic lines. It's—that's, you know, a whole other way that it's not sustainable, why it's brittle and—and not—not robust, not resilient.

**00:37:30**

Um, so how have I reconciled it? I've reconciled it to understand that I want to be part of building something local that looks at where—where the—our children's food is going to come from and maybe our food, if we're lucky, and recognize that the—what is the wealth of a region based on? You know, if—if you had been living in Chicago or—or, you know, the—the Great Lakes area during the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in this country, well, yeah, we got coal and iron ore and lime right here. Let's make steel.

**00:38:25**

You know, if you're living in the Pacific Northwest, well we have huge amounts of water rushing downhill that we can put behind dams and generate electricity. That's where our—that's the source of our wealth. If you're on the Sea Coast we have a really good harbor here that can

serve a lot of people and can be a place where people bring in the natural—in other words, it's all based on some sort of natural resource. Well what does the Delta have? We have iron ore? No. Do we have fossil fuels? No. Not in any amount that—that you could use. We have soil. We have deep soil, and we have a growing season that lasts longer than most of the country. The wealth of this—of this region of the world, if there is going to be one in the future, is going to be as it was in the past: agriculture. I don't know. You know, it's—it's a cliché that Greenwood once had more—or at least you know Greenville, I think it was—the Mississippi Delta had more millionaires in it than—than Chicago.

**00:39:26**

It was all based on King Cotton. It was grown, came out of these soils. It was grown in a very unsustainable way. It was grown using, if not slave labor, labor that was pretty damn close to slavery and, in other words, the social context was utterly unjust and—and wrong in many, many ways. But it was a regional economy based on the wealth that this land had to offer. And it's my belief that we're going to—I may live to see, but my children will certainly live to see a time when that's what regions have to fall back on again. When this little bubble, this little fun ride we've had with fossil fuels over the last 200 or 300 years runs out, there's going to be what there is—what there has always been—the wealth of the land. And how are we going—what are we going to build that based on? Is it going to be sustainable? Is it going to be economically and socially just? Are we going to, you know, take this large population that's gotten used to being able to say what they want and have people in places of power and be a—be a viable part of the community? Are we going to tell them to go back to the—go back to the shanties and the sharecropper shacks? I hope not. I don't want to be part of it, if that's what it's going to be. I want to try to be part of building up something that's going to be more viable, more just, more fair and more long-term sustainable.

00:41:16

**AES:** Where and how, if at all, do you think the Greenwood Farmers' Market fits into that and the people who are vendors there? A little bit of a jump, but it's in there.

00:41:25

**HF:** Yeah, I know that's what we're supposed to be talking about, isn't it? I don't know. Maybe not much. Maybe not much. I'd like to think it can be kind of a little nucleus. I sure see people come together there, sell what they have. I'm seeing the very beginnings of people having a little economy of locality. And I was interviewed for a **[Laughs]**—for an article in the *Delta Business Journal* not too long ago, and I gave her a very quotable thought—she thought it was and it came on the written word, and it came out something like, “This is the—the only place in the Delta that I've seen people of all racial, all cultural—all the churches, all the cultural groups, all the sexual orientations, all the ages, all come together and just have a good time and enjoy, smile, share a story, share some good food, and see each other as, ‘Oh yeah, here's someone I can deal with. Here is someone who is—maybe I have something in common with.’” So I—you know, maybe it's a little nucleus of something like that. I have fears about how long it's going to last and how well it's going to do and I wouldn't—I'm not going to pin all my hopes in it, but it's definitely something I'm devoting a lot of my time and energy into trying to help happen right now.

00:42:58

**AES:** Well talking about the social dynamic of the Market, do you see that as something that's happened specifically because of the Market? I mean was Greenwood primed for something like that to happen, and what is different that made it happen now?

**00:43:14**

**HF:** Good question. I think all the parts were in place for it—or most of them. There were a few people like me. I think Leann Hines [of Levee Run Farms]. I think some people who probably were kind of going in that direction and who suddenly had this thing that they could apply some of that to. I think it's been a real good kind of a catalyst or kind of a reactor vessel for some of that stuff.

**00:43:44**

Oh, I don't know if—you know, I don't know if it—it would be interesting to see how that would work without that.

**00:44:03**

**AES:** How do you mean exactly? Without what?

**00:44:05**

**HF:** If the Farmers' Market wasn't there, you know, I think Leann is established well enough now, and she's learned that she can make more money in Jackson, anyway. I think there are a few people—there are some people who are, you know—kind of did it enough that now I—  
“Gee, I could do this. You know, I can find a restaurant here and there that will buy my stuff.”  
Hmm. not—not sure where I'm going with that—help me a little bit.

00:44:39

**AES:** Well I mean I was telling you earlier, I have been coming to Greenwood for ten years. Ten years is not a long time, but Greenwood has, to me, changed by leaps and bounds just in that social dynamic and just the face of the town and what's going on here, and it's kind of an amazing place where you have now these restaurants and chefs who are able to source local ingredients, everything from Leann's chicken to blueberries to greens to, you know, everything comes to them from people who are growing it here in this place. But then the Market has grown something else entirely that is that social dynamic. And I mean even by its like physical location of being right there on the railroad tracks and who goes there, who sells there, who, you know, that—that the Market, to me, on some level is kind of an excuse for a coming together. And it's not always about the vegetables. But I don't know if I'm projecting or not. But I hope that—that is part of that and I just wonder if you've seen, having, you know, grown up here and come here for summers with your—your children and if—if you're too close to see that happening.

00:45:52

**HF:** Yeah, I can take that in two different directions. One is the vegetables that are—you know, the food and the other is the last one you suggested and don't let me forget—forget both of those. The good thing about the food end of it is that there is a huge community that it's not going to go to the Delta Bistro or Giardina's or, you know, anyplace like that and get that good local food that all the foodie-type people that I'm personally not at all interested in are going to go. And it's served that community and has even offered to some of that community a place that they can come and—and maybe even make a few dollars. And I think it's a good thing.

00:46:43

It is tiny right now to serve that community and really, really, really needs to get bigger. It needs to get more success, and I don't know what it's going to take to make that happen. I'm maybe not the person, but I'm—when I'm—I mean I try to find myself just pleading with people to come help make this thing work because it's vitally important in that area—for all the reasons that people talk about, you know, how that community—. I'm talking about the African American community in a poor Delta town, how are they going to be served to eat good food, not, you know, what—what, you know, your most outlets in that part of town have to offer them?

**00:47:26**

Where am I going with that? Anyway, the very real physical needs of that community and how to tie them into it and make them a part of it. I tried last year to get some of those—those churches you were talking about, their community gardens, get your kids out there growing stuff and bring it to the Market, and we'll give you a table and, you know, sell your stuff here at the Market. That would be such a beautiful two-way street, you know, to get that—that community producing things for the Market and the Market producing, you know—giving things back to that—that community.

**00:48:03**

On the cultural end of things, yeah, I don't know what else in this town is doing that, which you know is kind of disheartening when you think of how small a Farmers' Market is. You'll see tomorrow. I mean if we get a couple hundred people through there in a day, it's a remarkable day, you know. It's—it did better in its first couple of years when we had Carol [Puckett, director of Viking Special Projects] and Lise [Foy, former director of Main Street Greenwood] really, really pushing on it. It's—it's kind of—it's kind of become a thing that's not—it was trendy and popular with the—with the North Greenwood housewives and doctors'

wives and—and those—that crowd, you know, the people whose money you sort of need to make something like that happen, and that’s a shame. But, you know, and—and it’s one of those things in this part of the country you’re always going to have to balance. If we get too many of the dark-skinned people in here, it’s going to chase the white—the light-skinned—the North Greenwood crowd away. And if you get—if—if you aim at some—to totally to serve those people, then, you know, you’re not going to be offering what the—what the people in the south side of town need.

**00:49:34**

So I don’t know. If—it would be great if there were other institutions during this fallback in case this doesn’t work. Otherwise, it needs a few—a few more good people, you know, people not like me, maybe. I’m a good idea person, but I’m not—I’m not your in the trenches, let’s get this done type person. Lise and Carol were like, you know, maybe indispensable in that department.

**00:50:05**

**AES:** So you think the Market needs leadership to sustain itself for the future?

**00:50:12**

**HF:** Yeah, I think so. It would be great if the farmers could just take it over and say, “Okay, we’re just going to be our own self. We’re going to come out here and make it happen and—.” But I don’t see that happening for a while. We kind of had an experiment with that this summer, and it just—I don’t think it worked very well. No, we—we don’t have the leadership that we had. That’s for sure.

**00:50:37**

**AES:** So tell me about a day at the Market? And I also want to hear about your melon shakes. Can you give me a—

**00:50:44**

**HF:** What?

**00:50:45**

**AES:** Your melon shakes. Kind of paint a picture of—of a good day early in the season at the Market when things are in full swing?

**00:50:51**

**HF:** Well we open at 8:00. People get there around 7:30 and start setting up. And people start arriving before 8:00. Am I describing last year or this year? [*Laughs*]

**00:51:08**

**AES:** Any year you choose to describe would be fine.

**00:51:11**

**HF:** Okay. This is kind of going to be idyllic because it represents a couple years ago or maybe last year. You know, you got the young families coming in. You've got people who are there for the face painting and the music and, you know, "Okay, this is a place that I really want to be on a Saturday morning." It's a kind of wholesome, nice, feel good about the community kind of place to be, and that's where they want to be on a Saturday morning.

**00:51:46**

Older people coming in. It—it's kind of hard for me, you know. You're asking for a day at the Market. I'm not really quite sure how to describe that. I guess I'd mark it by, you know, the—the types of people you see coming through there and waves of people. Like I said, the young family, the young housewives, the—the older people, the more retirement age people. You know, I've got some cousins who are, you know, your basic little old lady activist people with the animal shelter and places like that who were—you know, we're really big on that. You know, we had the—we had the Master Gardeners. We had the Garden Clubs all interested, and those groups tended to generate a lot of people coming down because they had members and people had to talk about it among themselves and, "Oh, yeah, let's be part of the Farmers' Market. That sounds like a good thing."

**00:52:56**

And then—and then, you know, once we, especially—once we started having the Farmers' Market—market vouchers, senior—senior citizens voucher program, people could come down and spend \$5 vouchers for Farmers' Market food, and you started seeing a lot of people—more people from, you know, African American people, so you'd have that mixing. You'd actually have crowds of people talking to each other and standing around listening to the music, if nothing else.

**00:53:31**

This year we've had almost no music. We—we just haven't been able to afford it, you know. We haven't had the face painter. We haven't had the events. We haven't had—this week we're having such and such happening, and I don't know. This isn't turning into—this isn't turning into what you asked me. This is turning into more of a complaint.

**00:53:52**

**AES:** No, it's good because I—it also paints a picture of this year and how it's different and what—what a Farmers' Market kind of relies on to thrive. I mean it's not relying on vendors as much—because you have vendors. That it's more of the social elements to the—the space and the time that really speak to more of its success, at least speaking here specifically, I guess.

**00:54:16**

**HF:** Yeah, yeah. That's certainly got a lot of people down there in the first few years. For whatever reason this year people decided that it just wasn't that important or that interesting or— or something. You know, I don't know if the vendors are doing any worse. I think we're doing— some of them are doing just as well.

**00:54:40**

I'm not seeing that social mixing and interacting and—and celebration of the community and all that sort of thing going on that I was last year even, and it was probably down from the year before.

**00:54:56**

**AES:** Hmm. So how is that going to change?

**00:54:59**

**HF:** Boy, you got me.

**00:55:06**

**AES:** All comes back to money, I guess, huh? And energy?

00:55:10

**HF:** Leadership. It comes down to, you know, the money was good but we could—we could raise money this year. There were ideas for raising money. Lots of ideas got thrown around. This—this year we had people like me, idea people; we didn't have the doer-type people.

00:55:28

**AES:** So are there still regular meetings for the Farmers' Market? Is there a Board or just a general consensus of—of vendors?

00:55:36

**HF:** Not really. No. There—okay, this is going to be structural in place and it might be useful for the archives, if you will, you know, because it's real important. Main Street Greenwood has always owned the Downtown Greenwood Farmers' Market, and they did a great job of it. Like I said, Lise Foy could not have done a better job working with Carol Puckett to make all that good stuff happening the first couple of years—grants, so that we could hire the musicians to be there every week, advertising. Although I personally think the advertising is a lot less important than a lot of people think. But the—the idea of leadership is more than ideas and—anyway, Main Street Greenwood owned—owned it. You know, we needed to apply for all that grant money and everything like that they needed—these are decisions that were made a long time before I came along, and they were good decisions, no doubt, and needed a 501-c-3 organization to be able to apply for the grants, and that was Main Street Greenwood.

00:56:57

And so while it never acted like it the Downtown Greenwood Farmers' Market was always a project of Main Street Greenwood—and so it was always dependent on the leadership

of Main Street Greenwood, and because Lise was really into it, it just happened. And it's not that the current leadership is not into it, but I think there's a lack of—there's a lack of focus. It's more seen as just another project, which is kind of—Main Street Greenwood does its things on handing out grant money to people who do these little projects around town and events. And this isn't really a one-time project, like fix your storefront up, and it's not an event like a one-time event like let's have, you know, a Saturday barbecue event or whatever. It's something that requires commitment to a—to a long-term game plan of let's make this thing happen. And in years past, the Greenwood Farmers' Market went along with the illusion that it had control of its own self, and that was a good illusion because it did, in fact, have control. It was allowed to decide what it wanted to be. It was—it made decisions about how much we're going to charge of our vendors and how much—what are we going to allow in you know? Are we going to allow crafts? Are we going to allow, you know—all the little rules that were made. And the farmers, to some extent, and the Board, they called itself a Board, although it had no reality in fact, any kind of legal fact—Carol and Lise and Jamie and Kelly and me. I got elected to it. I guess it was the first year or maybe the second year. I made the mistake of not attending a meeting, and so they elected me on the Board.

**00:59:14**

Someone decided it would be great if the growers had a representative, and someone said, “Well, Hal is a representative. Let's let him be the—Hal is a grower—let him be the representative.” Which is kind of funny because I didn't really consider myself a grower. I was just a guy who had enough extra food in his kitchen garden to bring down to the Farmers' Market.

**00:59:37**

This isn't turning out to be a very good history as much as a polemic on my part.

Anyway, so that little group of people made decisions—felt ownership in the thing and had the activist spirit about it, you know, made things happen. [*Background-Horn*]

01:00:07

**AES:** Well let's pause this while that decides what it's going to do.

01:00:11

**HF:** Yeah, the Board—so this year we lost Lise. We have a new Board—I mean a new Main Street Greenwood Executive Director [Melissa Tribble], and she's not bad at all. She's real good at making events happen and it—you know, being there and she gets the advertisement done every week. She gets the—she got us on Facebook. She's made a lot of things like that happen, but I think she sees it too much as a—this is my project and I need to make it happen and not so much the teamwork thing, not so much the buy-in by the people who need to make it happen. And the people who had buy-in all abandoned us. Carol for obvious reasons [Carol no longer spends time in Greenwood]. Lise got a new job and moved away. Jamie and Kelly decided that the bookstore was where they wanted to put their effort and pretty much dropped out. And that left me, and I can't have a Board meeting with just me. And I'm not a Board anyway. So we were told earlier this year that, well, you know, really we're just a subcommittee of Main Street Greenwood, and I've never been invited to a meeting of Main Street Greenwood or anything like that. And so I don't—I don't even know what goes on meetings of Main Street Greenwood, but apparently we're not—we—we get told very often that, yes, they—they very much want us to be a success and they're really committed to us. But they're non-entities, as far as actually doing anything to make it happen, other than telling—telling Melissa Tribble to go do it, and she goes

and does it to the extent of her ability to imagine what that means. But I think that's lacking in—in a lot of ways. What that—what that means is having the—the focus, the energy, the excitement that people really want to make it happen are out there making it happen.

**01:02:06**

**AES:** So I hate to even put this on the table, but what if there's an end to the Greenwood Farmers' Market?

**01:02:13**

**HF:** I think what—I don't ever see it really ending. I could see it totally ending in the form it's got now. But I think people have gotten used to a place being out there. I think Hallie Streater will be there; she'll be out there. She'll find a place. She'll pull her truck up and pull the tailgate down and sell vegetables out of there. I think there might be a few other people that do that too. There will be legal issues around, you know, liabilities and who knows what, you know, and the Health Department may come down and shut us down every now and then, and we'll go run somewhere else if that happens. And I don't know. I can—It could become a gorilla Farmers' Market at that time. I don't know. *[Laughs]*

**01:02:56**

It would be a real loss to the community of Greenwood, in my opinion. It wouldn't—we wouldn't be serving the same communities because we wouldn't have—we wouldn't be qualified for the vouchers then. We would lose a lot.

**01:03:15**

**AES:** Well and something else you're fighting now and not just—not having leadership but we were speaking earlier about the State regulations that are coming down on vendors at the Market and what—what's that—can you explain that and what that's going to mean for some people who are affiliated with the Market?

**01:03:32**

**HF:** Yeah. You know, there's always been a tension between the many, many rules and regulations that—that rightfully regulate the sales of food in this country. I don't have to point too far to the e-coli episodes and everything to realize why we have those rules and the fact that most of our—most of the regulatory remedies to that involve things that aren't very plausible on a small scale.

**01:04:04**

That's a really convoluted way of saying they—they tend to be real expensive and shut out little people. You know, if—if you process 1,000,000 chickens a week, it's a lot easier to pay to have an inspector on site, you know, and jump through the hoops than it is if you do ten chickens a week, or, you know I mean, twenty-five chickens a week or something like that. So we're beginning to see the process of the—the regulatory agencies wrestle with how we're going to do this because I think there really is a desire on their part to find a way that allows people to still do what they've done from time—since there was agriculture, sell your wares in a—some sort of a market in the local village and yet meet, you know, their main goal, which is to have it be done in a way that's not going to kill people.

**01:05:16**

And so that's—that's a long preamble that you probably didn't need. What we're seeing now is a—the beginnings of the processes, the kind of health regulations that restaurants have

always had or long had to go through having their kitchens inspected, having—having to pass certain criteria of plumbing and facilities on hand. They’re coming up with real flexible rules to try to allow people to do that sort of thing in their kitchen. No, you’re not going to have a stainless steel counter. No, you’re not going to have three sinks and a separate bathroom for this or that or—but, you know, you need to not have, you know, a dog in the kitchen, you know. You need to not—you know, some rules that they’re going to require people to have. It involves taking a class that costs \$100, which is—is—well I’ll get to that. And you know, and then maybe a couple of inspections a year that could cost \$100 each, too. Okay, so that’s a couple hundred bucks a year and maybe \$300 the first year to get started. When you think about what it costs to maintain an inspector, any kind of government person to do a—do a—a decent job, a responsible job that’s not at all an unreasonable cost, and yet it may be more than some of these people can afford. They may not make \$300 in the year in their canned foods or—or something like that. I’m hoping that there is going to be a period where we figure out how to work into the system, but it looks like next year people who sell canned foods at a Farmers’ Market or prepared foods at a Farmers’ Market are going to be required to have some level of certification. And that—that’s going to price a lot of people out. We’re going to see that happen. I think we also may see some people seeing that as an opportunity. “Okay, I’m willing to jump through those hoops, pay the money, and I’m not going to have the competition that I would have had last year if I had gone down and done that with a—those nice Lay sisters there [Alisa Lay and Brenda Glenn, who sell as 2 Sisters in the Kitchen] [*Laughs*] selling their stuff that’s been there for three years now.”

01:07:36

So it—there’s going to be change, and I don’t know what it’s going to look like.

Unfortunately, that brings us back to our leadership issues. To shepherd that kind of change

through you need vision and you need leadership. You need someone going to people and saying, “Yes, I know this looks really tough to you right now, but here’s how we can make that happen. Here’s how we can help you get through those—those hurdles.” And that’s a question, you know, I think Hernando [Farmers’ Market] will make it happen. I think Jackson [Farmers’ Market] will make it happen. And maybe we’ll be knocked back for a little while and have to see how Hernando is doing it and figure out—learn from them how they’re doing it. I don’t know.

**01:08:22**

**AES:** Well what are you going to have at the Market tomorrow?

**01:08:26**

**HF:** Very little. I’m almost out of stuff. I’ll probably have a few banana peppers and maybe a couple eggplants and some hot peppers and not much else. I’ll be there at the table helping out selling tee-shirts and cold water and posters and—and tote bags like we always do and answering people’s questions, I hope.

**01:08:47**

**AES:** Well and tell me just a little bit more about your garden, if you don’t mind and—and how you plant and what you plant and what your kind of vision for that is going forward.

**01:08:56**

**HF:** That’s a—*[Laughs]* I wish I could claim to be the—the successful grower that people think I am. This year was a pretty tough year. Like I said, I have five acres. I’m growing on maybe a half an acre of it. The rest of it is lying fallow right now, and I’m just trying to hopefully let—

I'm building up fertility. I learned a long time ago that organic growing, which I'm not technically, but it means the same thing—growing without chemically implants and fertilizers and pesticides—takes at least five years to make—to get up to the level of fertility to make it be viable.

**01:09:37**

It's—I'm finding in the Delta it takes longer than that if you're not going at it in a very intensive way. So I'm growing a few things. I've got basically a little kitchen garden, and that's all I got. As in any kitchen garden, any kitchen garden is going to find themselves with more cucumbers and more squash and more melons at one point than they can eat. And I just bring the extra down and sell it, you know, at a table in the Farmers' Market, and that's all I'm doing really.

**01:10:05**

**AES:** Well and I mentioned your melon shakes earlier. Tell me—I don't think we talked about them. Tell me about those.

**01:10:10**

**HF:** Okay, that's started with Jamie. [*Laughs*] Jamie made—made smoothies one year when we had a table at the Farmers' Market, and he did it a couple of times. And last year started—I had more—I didn't have—especially toward the beginning and the end of my melons coming in, I don't have that many, you know. The—the first week a couple of melons come in and toward the end of it, it starts tapering off. You get the second growth melons. They don't have as much sugar in them. You know, what am I going to sell, \$3 melon or a \$4 melon? Two or three of those a day, I'm not going to make any money—value-added product. That's what we've been

talking about. I can take those melons and mix them with a little bit of John Ashcraft's blueberries, a little bit of honey from the Market booth table over there, some ice, and I can make a smoothie, and people want that. And so that's all I did. I just started—I brought a blender down and started turning my melons into smoothies and selling them at a very reasonable cost, and that's really all that's about.

**01:11:22**

**AES:** All right. So you do that every year or that just was kind of a couple-of-times deal?

**01:11:27**

**HF:** I did it last year, and I did it this year. I'm out of melons now and I—I could probably buy melons. I've got some blueberries left over. I could probably do that but I'm—I doubt if I'll do it for the rest of the year. The weather is—you know, we're not as hot as we were. I don't—it's a lot of trouble, and it's only a matter of time before the Health Department comes and shuts me down, too. I'm totally illegal.

**01:11:50**

**AES:** Well you mentioned John Ashcraft [of Roebuck Blueberry Plantation], and I did an interview with him a couple weeks ago. And that kind of makes me—this conversation kind of begs the question for me about your family's land and, you know, John Ashcraft from Roebuck Plantation and Leann Hines' grandparents having a plantation outside of Greenwood and how—like now people are, either by choice or by necessity, kind of trying to reinvent the family farm. And leasing out land for row crops but then needing or wanting to do something else to diversify and make some extra money and—you know Leann and her chickens and Mr. Ashcraft and his

blueberries and you and your five acres. Is there anything you can say that—that speaks to that and that kind of choice or responsibility or combination thereof?

**01:12:45**

**HF:** Yeah, Leann and John are—are real good examples. I'm not so good of an example because they—they have, from the beginning, have gone into it as something that they wanted to make and enterprise—happen and work. John made the investment of putting in those blueberries, got the equipment that he needed, got the irrigation in that he needed. He's got a really great little setup out there. He did the steps that it took to make something unique like that happen. Leann did the same thing with the chickens. She was—you know, I'm sure you know her story. You know, I don't need to go back over that, but she was doing horses and everything and got disabled and transitioned just stunningly well into chickens, you know.

**01:13:34**

I did not come into it wanting to do vegetables, like I said, you know. [*Laughs*] Now Leann is doing the chickens, which I kind of wanted to do at first. I still may but right now I just don't see my role as whether I make a little enterprise work or not, it doesn't matter. I get enough rent off my share of the family land that supports me as I sit here—indolent land owner and member of the parasitical, you know, land-owning class well enough that I—I live a subsistence life very simple, a monk's life out there on the farm. And so anyway, don't look at me as an example of that. I'm more in the idea stage of things right now, and I don't know what direction I'm going to go in. And, you know, I love being here, and this is my life and this is, you know, what I had to come back to and everything, but when I look toward, you know, my retirement and my real retirement and where I end up in life, my children are both Northern Californians, and I might very well end up in Northern California.

**01:14:54**

Blood is thicker than even mud, even Delta mud, maybe. And so I'm a great idea guy, but I'm not necessarily the guy to look to on how to make those things happen.

**01:15:12**

**AES:** Do you think that your family land will stay in the family in perpetuity, or is that something that is a question for you and the rest of your family in the future?

**01:15:23**

**HF:** That's a real good question. I don't see either of my kids ever coming back and wanting to farm Last Resort. It's not their last resort; certainly not their first resort. **[Laughs]** As a long-term investment, I can't think of anything better in the world. It'll always pay them a good rent. If they want to be absentee landowners and go through whatever careers they have, that's—that's the model.

**01:15:50**

I don't necessarily see that being a sustainable model in the future, but I don't see a lot of things we do now being sustainable in the future. I'm trying to educate them, educate myself, educate those around me, and a lot of those decisions are going to have to be made by the people that come after me. I'm—I see myself as a kind of a in between person. What I do doesn't really make a whole lot of difference, I don't think. What I do to help the people doing what they're doing now to transition to what we're going to do in the future, hopefully will be a little bit of a part of that conduit and figure out my role in that, which may be little and may be larger. I don't know. That—that's all I'm trying to do—figure out what my role is to fit it in that.

01:16:42

**AES:** Well what do you think if—if you could say what your great-grandfather might think about the Last Resort Plantation today, would he see it as being very different?

01:16:50

**HF:** That’s funny because my—my best friend on the coast tells me [*Laughs*]*—*he has a great line that I don’t know if I can duplicate it quite well. It’s a—you know, I own some oceanfront, I mean not oceanfront, some highway frontage out there that’s probably worth \$25,000 an acre. I could sell that and make a lot of money. My friend says, “Your great-grandfather would have sold that in a heartbeat.” He came from Tennessee not because he was you know—he didn’t go back to Tennessee where his father was. He stayed here because this is where the action was. He said, “You need to be ruthless enough to take what’s there to get and go where the action is.” And if that’s Northern California, maybe that’s Northern California. I don’t know.

01:17:38

I think this land is actually more sustainable than Northern California in a lot of ways. I kind of like the idea of being a fallback. If my children ever discover that Northern California is not as sustainable as they think it is, or if they ever even start thinking about sustainability but boy, I’ve just—I’ve just went about three different tangents just on that one line. So what—what would he have done? He was a member of that generation that saw the world as their oyster to go out there and pluck, you know. The Delta was the—the California or the Texas of its day; fortunes to be made, turnover some of that black soil and put a few slaves and make it—make a fortune out of it, you know.

01:18:26

So they put down roots and their grandchildren had very deep roots here, and I'd like to honor that in some way, but we also come from a long line of immigrants, people who have been willing to sever the ties and go to where the—where the action is.

**01:18:49**

I feel kind of connected to this land. I feel connected to the people around here and, in a way, that it's just more interesting to me. I don't necessarily care what Northern California does. I care that, you know, people like the—the Hallie Streater's of the world and the—the poor people around here and the—and the people with the aristocratic roots around here, you know, find a life together here somehow that is sustainable and long-term and of value somehow.

**01:19:23**

**AES:** Well that might be a good note to end on. I've taken a lot of your time here, but I actually have one more question, if I might be so greedy. But that kind of—sparked in my head kind of the idea of the dynamic of you being of the family of Last Resort Plantation and there being African American families who are of that land and worked that land and if all these generations later if there's still people within the City of Greenwood that you interact with who have that connection to your family land and if there were ever those connections that made at the Farmers' Market, if that makes sense.

**01:19:57**

**HF:** As a matter of fact, yes. I've met one man out there who told me he grew up out there—you know, a man a bit older than me—buys my okra. How's that for a circle? **[Laughs]** That's great, I think. You know, I believe the future and, you know, like I said, we could spend another two or three hours here talking about why I believe this, but I believe the future is people living

on the land, people living in patterns that aren't a whole lot different than the patterns that man grew up in. I hope it can be done in a way that's a lot more sharing of the wealth that comes off that land. It won't be, you know, twenty families living in dirt floor huts and one family living in a large house and sending their children to college in Europe, you know. I'd like to see that—but—but the wealth still comes out of the ground. I'd like to see it spread around a little bit better, but with the understanding that that's what the economy is going to be based on and so, yeah, you know, it may come around full circle. I mean we may see that connection. I've made a little bit of it. You know, I meet a lot of people that come from to the Last Resort—I mean not Last Resort but the plantation just north of me, a much bigger one—Racetrack—and those memories still persist. The churches are still out there, and people living in Greenwood still go to church out there because their grandfathers and great-grandfathers went to church out there, you know. And those—those roots are still down there. I'd like to make that connection.

**01:21:40**

Oh, the most amazing thing [*Laughs*], this—this may be—I'll try to make a thumbnail version of this. We had a young man and his wife at the Market last year. They were only here a couple—a couple of sessions—young Jewish man from California and his African American wife from Carroll County or Montgomery County. Her family name is Loggins; the other name for my plantation is the Loggins' Place. My mother was a Loggins. My grandfather was from Montgomery County, which is where the Loggins—the Loggins—it's a long story—came from Tennessee, some of them came down to Mississippi, and some of them went out to Texas. And the ones that went out to Texas spawned people like Kenny Loggins [the musician] and people like that. [*Laughs*]

**01:22:41**

So here's this woman at the Farmers' Market, sharing a table with me one day—one time with her Jewish [*Laughs*] Southern Californian husband. He's here to teach permaculture and have a farm in Northern Mississippi, and she's a Loggins. Her ancestors probably were owned by one of my ancestors. And her particular family name is Lucas, which is in my other—the other line of my—my family down here. And so yeah, you know, undoubtedly the link isn't direct to my land out there, but it's direct to my family out there, who gave their name to that land out there. If you look on the map, that's called the Loggins' Cemetery, the mound out there; there isn't a Loggins buried out there, but there are members of my family buried out there. And there's her family.

**01:23:47**

Maybe, just maybe, someone like me sitting in a fulcrum position at some point helps all that come back together and find it's full circle. I'm not exactly sure what it's going to look like, but it's not going to happen, if I'm not here, trying to make it happen.

**01:24:05**

**AES:** Wow, that's amazing. Well, as I said, we've been here a long time. I've been greedy with your time, and I appreciate it. Is there anything—is there anything that I haven't asked about any part of this that you want to make sure to mention or another note to end on?

**01:24:29**

**HF:** Not that I can think of. Sorry.

**01:24:32**

**AES:** No, no. No apologies. Well thank you, Hal, for your time. This has been wonderful, and I've enjoyed listening to all your stories. I appreciate it.

**01:24:40**

**HF:** You're welcome. Thank you.

**01:24:41**

**[End Hal Fiore Interview]**