

HERMAN SULLIVAN
Shiloh Seventh-day Adventist Church – Greenwood, MS

* * *

Date: September 23, 2011
Location: Shiloh Seventh-day Adventist Church – Greenwood, MS
Interviewer: Amy Evans Streeter
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
Length: 1 hour, 36 minutes
Project: The Cultivated South

[Begin Herman Sullivan Interview]

00:00:00

Herman Sullivan: My name is Herman Sullivan.

00:00:01

Amy Evans Streeter: Oh, one second. This is Amy Streeter for the Southern Foodways Alliance on Friday, September 23, 2011. I'm in Greenwood, Mississippi, with Mr. Herman Sullivan here at his church. And Mr. Sullivan, if I could get you to please state your name and your occupation and affiliation with the church, if you don't mind?

00:00:21

HS: Okay, my name is Herman Sullivan. I'm a Deacon here at the church, and I'm an officer also. I'm the head gardener. And I'm retired Physical Plant Director for Mississippi Valley State University.

00:00:38

AES: Okay. And we're at the Shiloh Seventh Day Adventist Church. If I could get you to say the name of the church and then also just give me a little bit of the church's history. I know that there is a long history in this neighborhood in Greenwood.

00:00:48

HS: Okay. Shiloh Seventh Day Adventist Church here, well, we've been here in Greenwood for—this—we'll celebrate our 95th anniversary next year, and we've been in this particular

building since 1971. We—we are a progressive-type church. We—we're an outreach church. We try to touch people's lives. We have a health law that we go by based on the Bible. We have a food network, community service center; we have a clothing giveaway and also we have health fairs every two weeks.

00:01:25

AES: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about the—the rules that you follow in the Bible, as far as health and diet are concerned?

00:01:30

HS: Okay. We—we mainly go by the—the vegan diet, but some—some of us are just fruit, grains, and nuts people. You know, they stick with the biblical diet that God gave us to eat: fruit, grains, and nuts. But of course some of us eat substitutes, the grillers, different types of stuff like that—that—protein meat substitutes that we eat. I'm not too keen on the other things that we're allowed to eat because we don't reach out that far. We do not eat pork, period. We do not eat catfish nor shellfish, and the meat that we eat has to have a split hoof and does have to chew the cud in order for it to be a clean meat for us to eat. No fowls of any kind and, like I said, no shellfish.

00:02:40

AES: Okay. And if you don't mind my asking, when we met before, you told me a great story about how you became affiliated with this church and that it involved food. Can you tell a little version of that story for the record?

00:02:52

HS: Oh, yeah. I was—when I was in high school, my—my principal, Mr. Outlaw, was the—was the head elder here at this church. And we used to, you know, cut classes and do different things like that. So he showed an interest in me, and he mentored me and he started taking me to church with him at this church.

00:03:16

So lo and behold, he took me home with him for family dinner on every Saturday and— and through that relationship, through that meal, it showed that he cared about me and he wanted me to have a clean life. And he told me that my body was the temple of God, and he said I shouldn't put anything else in it unless it was clean. So he was real instrumental in teaching me how to live and how to conduct myself and, through those meals, it really helped me out. So we went camping sometimes on—on the weekend and we went to Oakwood University [a historically black Seventh-Day Adventist institution of higher learning] up in Huntsville, Alabama, to different events, and all of them was surrounded by a good potluck meal.

00:04:06

AES: And since food was—is such a part of the scripture and your values here at the church, what did food mean to you before then?

00:04:12

HS: You know, food didn't mean anything before then because everything was just basic, you know. I was living in the country, and we killed hogs. I ate everything I wanted to eat—catfish, just whatever. We—we didn't know anything about the health laws, didn't know anything about

the health laws until I got to this faith, and then I found out that the pork contributed—high-cholesterol potential, along with the catfish and different things like that.

00:04:58

AES: Now the—the faith laws, also you can't have any stimulants, correct, like caffeine and—?

00:05:02

HS: No caffeine, no coffee, no chocolate; we don't do those kinds of things. We do very few drinks—carbonated drinks. Mostly we do a coffee substitute called Roma, where we drink that, and our cheese is made from tofu. We have non-dairy margarine. A lot of people don't understand why we do that—because if you—we drink soymilk. If you're going to drink the milk from your cow, you might as well eat the cow. You see, what I'm saying? So we—we don't do any kind of dairy products because of the fact that cow milk was made for cows. And cow milk is beef, and so we prefer soymilk that's made from grain, and it's supposed to be better for us, and we're mostly doing what the Bible say do.

00:06:13

AES: So if—if your faith laws are really specific in what you can eat—and I should also say, for the record, that we're here to talk about the church's community—or the church's garden that y'all established about a year ago, and we'll talk about that. But I wonder if—if your faith laws also—if growing and providing your own food is important and comes from the scripture, as well. Is that something that got y'all interested in doing a garden?

00:06:39

HS: Yes, it did and the Bible is not selfish about what it teaches. And you don't want to go to heaven and be the onliest one up there by yourself. We have people in this community, our elderly people in the community that they can't get to the supermarket and get the type of vegetables and stuff that they need. And we felt that we should play a part in helping them get the type of nutrition—nutrients that they needed.

00:07:05

Our diet consists of fruit, grains, and nuts, and the community garden will help us to help them. We grow the vegetables; we grow the fruit. We, in turn, make sure that they get the—the proper diet that they need in the community because we got some Oriental stores and Jitney Jungles and Double Quicks [convenience stores]. You can't get tomatoes and—and turnip greens and butter beans and peas and stuff of that nature that you can prepare for yourself. So that's what where come in as a church. We figure we come in with this garden and we got this grant from the [Delta] Health Alliance and—and it's our third year. It's doing great—good program. Works hand-in-hand with our—with our Food Network Program for the Mississippi Food Network. We give out food twice a month there, and those are mostly canned foods and dried vegetables—beans and peas and such.

00:08:09

So the vegetables we raise in the garden, they do well with the—with the Food Network. They have their flour and their meal and the stuff of that nature and the oil that they need, the canola oil, and we provide the vegetables. So they get a good—they get all four basic food groups, and it's win-win. Whether the people join our church or not, it doesn't make any difference. We want to make a difference in the community. We want to make sure that other peoples are healthy—other peoples are healthy, other peoples are, you know, receiving the benefits and the bounty that—that the Lord has set out for them.

00:08:48

AES: So tell me about the neighborhood where the church is located and how that community ministry has served the community at large.

00:08:57

HS: Okay, this—this is a—this community has, I'd say, about forty-percent is elderly and about thirty-percent young adults, and I would say other percents would be kids. We have two schools in this neighborhood, and one Head Start Center. And the people respond well. We give away clothes twice a month. And we give away food twice a month. So this church has really become a place where people come to—to really fulfill their needs.

00:09:41

We have a counseling program also. You know, people have problems. And our church is not the—here to save the world but we're here if you need us. That's—that's what we are. We're just here if you need us. And the community around us, man, we got a good community. Like I said, we got two schools in this neighborhood, and we got a Head Start Center. And we have several other churches in the community we work with, partnership with. And they come down and help us out. One church even gave us a lot. Providence Baptist Church had a lot that it was going to build a house on with the Habitat for Humanity, and some kind of way the deal fell through and the guy came and said, "Herman, you think your church would like this lot on this corner?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well get your lawyer to come down and do the paperwork." We got the lot. And we keep it cut. Next year we're going to start a garden spot with that. We got—now we have three lots. We're going to put vegetables and fruits on all three of those lots. And food will become our ministry and, in the near future, food will become my ministry,

helping others to help themselves, bringing people down to help out in the garden to do some chopping and do some cultivating and stuff. And, in turn, they'll be participants in the program to receive and to help issue out, and it's just a community-type program that—that unites the community and it helps out. It helps out. The economy is kind of tough right now, but we can't use that as an excuse not to do good. We can't depend on anyone else, you know. The Lord gave you everything you need. The only thing you got to do is thank him for waking you up in the morning and go do what it is you got to do.

00:11:26

And—and a lot of times I hear people making the excuses, “Well, I can't do this and can't do that.” There's no such word in this church as *can't*. What we say is, “Let's do it. Let's do it.”

00:11:43

AES: So tell me about the grant that you got from the Delta Health Alliance and how that worked and how you found out about it.

00:11:49

HS: We got that grant through the Delta Health Alliance, really it was online. And we got it through the Healthy Church Challenge. We have a program called Healthy Church Challenge that went along with the grant. We did a survey, and the survey consisted of the people in church, how many had vegetables three—four times a week. Let's see.

00:12:21

I got a copy of the survey here, and a copy of the survey reads: *These questions are about the foods you usually eat or drink. Please tell us how often you eat or drink each one of these*

foods. For example, twice a day, three times a day, once a month, so forth. Remember, we are only interested in the foods you eat both at home and away from home.

00:12:44

Okay, the first question we said, *How do you drink fruit juice such as orange juice, grapefruit juice and tomato juice—once a day, once a week, once a month, never?* The next one is, *Not counting juice, how often do you eat fruit?* You know the same thing, *How many times per day, how many times per week, how many times per month or never. How often do you eat green salads?* This—this is the part of the survey that we did and it is a requirement in order to receive the grant, which is pretty simple. Each church member did one. Each family had to fill out one and through that they—they based the nutrition level—the nutrient level of the entire church on how much intake they had on the vegetables that they took in, the—the fruit juices, the salads, how much exercise you do per week, per day, per month, and through that Health Alliance we did that—that survey and they based that grant on the survey. And they gave us some challenges.

00:13:55

They provided the equipment. We—we had a Healthy Church Challenge where it—it involved the entire community and not just the church. We had a weigh-in. Everybody came in and did their weigh-in. They got their cholesterol checked. They got the—they got the check for diabetes. They got checked for their heart, blood pressure, and we broke it down in groups. We had five captains, and we had five groups. And each group was competing against each other to become the most healthiest in a period of ninety days. So after the first month, we had a weigh-in to see what we were. And after the second month we had another weigh-in to see where we were. And then the third month we had a weigh-in, to see where we were and we averaged out the three weigh-ins that we had along with the initial weigh-in, and we see what kind of progress we

had made. Some of us, of course, you know didn't make any progress. **[Laughs]** Some of us did make progress. You know, some of us, you know, like some of the people that were senior citizens, they couldn't exercise, you know what I'm saying. They couldn't get out and jog and stuff. But at the end of the day, everybody received an award, but the overall award went to the peoples that did the best on the diabetes, did the best on the high blood pressure, did the best on their—their weight, and there was a grand prize for the person that did the best in all—all four categories.

00:15:41

So the community was involved. We had peoples that were—that were kind of obese that—that are still in the program. We have peoples coming back and saying, “Well, I want to be weighed in again.” So they just want to continue the program, even though the challenge is over. They still come back, “So what do we have to do now?” So the church has to put on Health Fairs. So we have to be there for them. So we set up a date for them to come in and get checked out. So we still check their blood pressure. We still check their cholesterol. We still check the—the sugar level. We still do the weigh-ins, and that way we're keeping the tabs on the whole community. It's not a Healthy Church Challenge; it's a Healthy Community Challenge, you see. And it ain't about going to Heaven all the time. It's about taking care of each other while we're here on earth. And that—that means that they're making room for us in Heaven. We take care of what we need to do here on earth, the Lord reads hearts.

00:16:50

Now you can fool me; you can't fool Him. And when you treat your fellow man right and try to live right, I think it's all he requires of you to do. And remember that your body is a temple of God and to try to keep it clean. No alcohol, no cigarettes, no drugs—unless the doctor prescribes them. Some churches, you know, they don't take—don't go to the doctor and they

don't take no drugs and stuff like that but we—we adhere to what the—what the medical field says. If they say I got hypertension, I'm going to get my blood pressure medicine. If they say I got diabetes, I'm going to take my shots or my pills or whatever. So that means we have to take care of ourselves, no matter what condition we're in. You have to take care of yourself. So that's—that's has had a positive impact on our—on our community.

00:17:45

The Healthy Church Challenge has bled over into the Healthy Community Challenge now. Our Food Network gives away food twice a—twice a month, the first—second and fourth Sunday. And our Clothes Closet that gives away clothes every quarter. See we get clothes from Cato's [clothing store]. We get clothes from Belk [department store]. There are two or three other places we get clothes from that, when they change over during the different seasons or the peoples come and something happens to the clothes, they return them, they let us know to come pick them up, and we go pick them up on our van, our trailer, and come back, hang them out, and distribute them out.

00:18:39

Now I don't know—one of our pastors here come up with that connection with—with Cato's and Belk, and it's another store out here at this strip mall where we get clothes. But there's some good clothes, man. There's some good clothes. Yeah, and it's for the whole—you know, you can outfit your whole family. It takes a load off, uh-hmm, yeah.

00:19:05

AES: Well if I may, let me back up to this Health Challenge that was part of the grant. Were you surprised by the results that came from your congregation?

00:19:13

HS: Yes, I was surprised because—because some peoples, they got so involved. It got—you know, it got so competitive and they—they got so involved, man, you just had—everybody was just so excited about being healthy.

00:19:31

You see, it did a lot to uplift our church. It did a lot to uplift our community. You know what—the only people that had a chance to be involved—our young people had a chance to be involved, all age groups were involved, and everybody was on the same page with the same goal in mind, and it really did a lot for us. The camaraderie, man, some of the old peoples, you know, that you thought was stuck up and they—they were in charge. Man they had their groups where—“Man, y'all better get in shape.” Man, I'll tell you what, people were having private weighing in—private weigh-ins, you know. They carried little groups together and they did private weigh-ins, and they were keeping up with their stats and stuff. It was exciting; it's still exciting. And we just had a Health Fair two weeks ago, so I'm looking forward to staying healthy. Although, you know, I suffer with arthritis, and I'm a disabled veteran and—but I don't let that stop me. We do what we have to do, you know.

00:20:31

My knees swell, my ankles swell, my wrists swell, but we keep going, and that's the nature of this business. Yeah, we're put here for a purpose. Put here for a purpose. The Healthy Church Challenge is a good deal.

00:20:46

AES: Well, were you surprised, I mean being that your health laws dictate your eating habits, were you surprised, when the survey came back, of the amounts that people were eating of vegetables and fruits or was there anything—anything surprising in those results?

00:21:00

HS: Yes, I was surprised that—that some of the people, you know, that—that don't get vegetables—none during the week. They have bologna sandwiches, they have hotdogs, you know, they have stuff like that—they go to McDonald's, French fries, hamburgers. People just were not eating healthy. That really surprised me. And—and what I want to do is duplicate this and do the survey in the community. I'd like to do the survey in the community, you know, just go from—through the street that the church is on, which is about a half mile long, along with the letter, letting them know that we here at Shiloh, we are praying for your family, and we would like for you to take this survey. There may be something we can help you do. And we're talking about that now. We're talking about that now, going into people's homes with the survey, so we can find out what it is we need to do more of just where the peoples are, you know, with—with their diet. We want—we want to get involved in that—in that aspect. We just—we just can't have this program and stop. You see what I'm saying? It's too good a program to stop here in church.

00:22:23

This program has to go out in this community and, hopefully, when it leaves this community, it'll go to another community and then maybe it'll go to Indianola, to Grenada, to Greenville, and you know what that'll do? The impact that will have on the Delta? It would be great if this just would just catch on fire, this Healthy Church Challenge, and just move all over the Delta. Because, see, I was listening to the news about a week ago, and we were number forty-

eight in the United States for obesity. It might be forty-nine—the Delta, here in Mississippi—and we were number fifty, as far as diabetes is concerned and that—that’s—that’s not good.

00:23:13

And the sad part of—of these statistics, as far as I’m concerned, is what—what are we—what are we doing about it? We’re just a statistic. What are we doing about it? Who is doing something about it? That’s why I’m glad you came by. You know, I was glad you came by. You’re interested in how we’re doing down here in the Delta. And then that makes me feel real good that someone cares. Ole Miss is trying to do something in the Delta to help us out here, and you asked would I do an interview. I’d be glad to do anything I can—anything I can to—to help promote this concept y’all got on food. I mean and just whatever we can do, we’ll do it.

00:24:00

AES: Well y’all definitely have an amazing thing going here, and I’m so glad to know about it. But I wonder, you know, you were talking about growing up and raising hogs and having a garden. What do you think happened and—and why are people so unhealthy in the Delta today?

00:24:16

HS: Well some peoples in my church think it’s hereditary, that it’s passed down, like hypertension is passed down along with diabetes. Because our fore-parents ate, you know, different stuff they didn’t supposed to eat that we’re just finding out about. We—we had to eat what we had to eat in the country in order to survive, you know. When we lived in the country, see, we—we didn’t have—we didn’t have no meat every day. We had greens or beans or peas and cornbread every day. When you got off the school bus, that’s what you had every day. And you know, my—my mother cooked this fatback and some days we had turnips, bottoms you know,

like when you go to the end of the cotton field and our boss [at Longshot Plantation in Teoc] had—he be planted turnips at the end of—at the end of what they called a turn row. And so my mom would always go out there and get turnips. Sometimes they had a few little green stems in them, you know.

00:25:25

But they're white, and when you luck up and get a piece of fatback in there, you couldn't tell the difference between the fatback and a turnip. That was a delight, you see. So we didn't have meat every day. So when you got that piece of fatback during the week, hey, man, you were lucky. And on Sunday we would kill a chicken, and we'd have Sunday dinner. We knew we were going to kill a chicken Sunday. You know, it was automatic, until hog-killing season came around. And that's when everybody gathered around in a big party, and the fire and the barrel and heat the water up, and one of the neighbors might be killing a hog, and someone else might be killing two. So when we'd kill hogs, everybody would sort of kill hogs at the same time. And we all salted them down at the same time and put—put them in the smokehouse and we ate off them all through the winter.

00:26:18

And the sweet potatoes like we were growing—I'm going to do a sweet potato bank. These kids don't know what a sweet potato bank is, you know. We get the hay and the corn stalks and put the sweet potatoes in a pile and put the corn stalks around it and pile the dirt on top of them and then put the hay on there and then put a hole in where you can reach in and get sweet potatoes out during the winter, so the frost won't spoil them. These kinds of things we miss doing, man, I just miss doing. But like I say, I didn't know pork—the diet—I didn't know pork was bad on you—the circulatory system. I didn't know about its effect on—the pork's effect on giving you hypertension. I just didn't know that. So when I learned better, I started doing better.

And of course you can come to this church, and you can eat what you want to eat, but if you going to register with the Lord, you're going to do what the Lord says to do. So we don't want anyone to think that you can't come to this church if you eat pork. This church is a hospital for sinners. If you're drinking whiskey, this is where you need to be. If you're on drugs, this is where you need to be. If you're not treating your family right, this is where you need to be.

00:27:44

Some people say, "I'll come when I get right, get my life together." Well, you will never get your life together because God has to get your life together for you, so you need to come as you are. We'll clean you up; we'll make you healthy; we'll save your soul, and we'll educate you. Yeah, that's what we do.

00:28:12

AES: So tell me how the garden has not only facilitated the—the congregation's health, but also how has it served to educate young people, the people who didn't grow up in the country and don't know about raising food?

00:28:28

HS: Okay, we—we got a group called the Pathfinders. They're something like the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts. We bring those guys out and let them help out doing the ground preparation, some of the planting, and they were surprised. They thought everything come from the grocery store. They didn't know you could grow greens out of the ground, so we got some Styrofoam cups and gave them all some watermelon seeds and, you know, let them participate and—and have some firsthand experience on—on doing some—doing some planting and stuff.

00:29:07

And man, you can't keep them out of the garden. But they learned that when you do things like in the garden, it goes further than them. It goes onto their kids. They're going to tell their kids about that. They're going to tell their friends about that—that don't know about that. And then what it does, it enlightens them in a way to where they know how nature works. They know how nature works. And—and they know how nature works, as far as the—the seeds germinating. They see them in a glass jar when they first come out of it and stuff. And as it grows up, they take a picture of it at—at six weeks. They take a picture at ten weeks until it starts to bear. And when they have a hand in that, man, there's no better feeling than seeing those guys running around showing their parents just what they've done and—and—and what they've grown and the watermelon, they got theirs with sticks around it and got it marked off with flags, you know, their stuff—their stuff. And it makes a difference, now. **[Laughs]** It makes a difference.

00:30:19

You might not see it right now. It might be subtle, but it really makes a difference. A girl asked me the other day—and she don't talk much and we were—we were getting out of Sabbath School and she asked me, “Brother Sullivan, did I do good this summer in the garden?” You see, what I'm saying? The garden is over with. I said, “Yeah, girl, you did good in the garden.” “Will you tell my mama?” I said, “You tell her. And I'll back you up. You tell your mama, and I'll back you up.” And, of course, the mama said she didn't grow nothing. I said, “She did a good job. She grew some cantaloupe. She grew some peppers. She did a good job in the garden.” She said, “I didn't know she could do that.” I said, “I'll tell you what, you should see these kids, how they garden. They can really go.”

00:31:03

AES: And it's instilled some pride in them.

00:31:04

HS: Well, they're taught—they pulled all the peaches off the peach tree. Now they can do some things, too, now. They pulled all the peaches off the peach tree and were throwing them at each other and stuff. But that pride you instill in those kids growing up will keep them out of jail. It'll keep them off the street. It'll keep them thinking—thinking on their feet.

00:31:25

AES: Are there children who have—have worked here at the church garden and then gone home and planted some things in their yard at home?

00:31:31

HS: I think some kids here in the church garden have went, in fact, and teach class at the Botanical Garden at their school, I heard. You know, they got this little—the Botanical Gardens at school where they got their little plants and stuff they'll grow and they got—on one end and then they got an aquarium on the other end. [*Laughs*] I heard they been over there talking about me over there, “Brother Sullivan said you can't do that.” They plant some little stuff over there, you know, and they know it all right now, you know, our kids how they know it all right now. But they haven't gone home and did it, but I heard they're over there in that—I don't know what they call it out there, it's like a little aquarium, but they plant stuff in it and stuff like that and—at school at the elementary school. I can't think of the name of it. [*Train in Background*]

00:32:19

But anyway—anyway, they're excited. Yeah, they're excited—they're excited. When kids get their—have that hands-on experience on—on working with stuff and they see that result, no matter how long it takes, they'll wait on it. They will. They—they'll be—they couldn't wait on the peaches. They just couldn't wait, but on the stuff that's coming out of the ground and they're taking pictures of it and stuff, and they really want to see that come out and it raises their interest a great deal.

00:32:47

AES: And so they get about—excited about growing. Do they get excited about eating the food that comes out of the garden as much?

00:32:53

HS: Well our kids are different eaters. They eat everything that we serve because we don't have a lot of different options. Mostly we eat, like I say, fruits, vegetables and nuts—stuff like that. Well, they eat everything. These kids eat everything. They don't—they eat everything. I'll tell you. They don't eat bologna. They don't eat hotdogs. They don't eat that kind of stuff. They eat vegetables. They love vegetables, man.

00:33:28

Now we have—we have one day every month, the first Sabbath, we have—we have milk and honey, you know. That's what you're going to have when you get to Heaven so we—we get a couple gallons of milk and some Honey Nut Cheerios, and they come an hour early to church for the milk and honey. You know, just like a treat, you understand what I'm saying? And they look forward to that. They look forward to the milk and honey. Other than that, they don't—I

don't know what they do at home, but here, we serve here every Sabbath and we—we mostly serve beans, corns, grains, cabbage, peas, purple hull peas, okra, and stuff of that nature.

00:34:14

AES: So every Sabbath there's a meal here at the church?

00:34:17

HS: There's a meal here. There's a meal here every Sabbath.

00:34:19

AES: And Sabbath is on Saturday, correct?

00:34:21

HS: Right, on Saturdays at our fellowship—this is our fellowship hall here what we're in now and—

00:34:27

AES: So who cooks those meals?

00:34:29

HS: We have a Hospitality Committee. And the Hospitality Committee appoints different peoples to bring different things, like I might have the cornbread this—this Sabbath or next—I might have potato salad next Sabbath, or I might have the spaghetti the next Sabbath. So

everybody has a different—different role to play. Or I just might be—be get lucky and do the punch, something like that. But everybody—we all chip in.

00:34:59

AES: And do the kids chip in, too? Are they involved in bringing food or just—?

00:35:03

HS: Well, the kids mostly do the serving. They do the serving. We try to keep them engaged while we're fellowshiping to—to help learn how to be a role model for the younger kids. Put the aprons on. They serve different tables. They serve the kids first, and then they serve the adults and after the meal—after everyone has eaten, they'll do the cleanup. They'll pick up and clean all the tables off and everything and take the trash out and just, you know, general housecleaning stuff.

00:35:41

You know kids—if you don't teach a kid these things, how do you expect them to—to carry them out, you know? I see some people saying, "I'm going—I'm going to tear you up." I said, "No, you should have been tearing him up at home. It's too late for you to start tearing up here at church," you see? So at the church we try to teach them how—how to—to do things, as far as the food preparations are concerned, the preparation, the serving, the—the after—after we get through eating, the cleanup deal, you know, and making sure the garbage is out to keep the insects and roaches and stuff down and let them know why and they—they get along good together. They know who going to do what. The little boys there, they're going to take the garbage out, and the girls are going to clean the tables off, and they're going to wash the dishes, and everything will be just like it is now. So everything is clean. Everything is clean. It's ready

to go and that's—you know that's a part of us—that's something we should be doing as parents, teaching our kids these types of things, you know.

00:36:52

AES: So—go ahead.

00:36:53

HS: Go ahead.

00:36:53

AES: I was just going to ask if I am remembering correctly that—that Pathfinder Group, that there was a canning class for that group of kids.

00:36:59

HS: Yeah, we got—we got a Canning Honor. It's like, you know, Honor that the Boy Scouts get, but we have a Canning Honor. We have a—an Honor for Astronomy. As a matter of fact, we're supposed to be going up to the Observatory up at the Academy next month. They have different Honors they do. The Canning Honor is mostly set up to—to where the kids would learn how to can vegetables and fruit because of the fact that you can everything else in the freezer and it'll—it'll hold up pretty good. But we wanted to do old-fashioned canning, and we want to teach them about botulism. And the temperature you have to bring the product up to in order to combat that botulism and—and bacteria and stuff that's—that—that you're going to be dealing with.

00:38:11

A lot of our kids know about botulism in this church, know about these different processes, because we feel like one day we're going to have to take care of ourselves. We're going to depend on this earth to take care of us, so we need to learn how to do these processes.

00:38:27

Kids on the street wouldn't know anything about botulism. But our kids do and we—we kind of get them prepared to where, if we be gone ahead, passed on—what I'm saying, they can take care of themselves. They can raise their food. Or they can put it up, preserve it. They'll know how to share their food. They won't be selfish. They'll know how to be communal, you know, think on a community basis, not just for themselves now. Think about bringing others—bringing other peoples in with them that are having a hard time because we—we feel like this thing is going to wrap up, and it's going to be kind of rough here pretty soon. It might not be in my lifetime, it might not be in your lifetime, but if things keep going the way they're going, our kids are going to have a hard road to go, and they're going to have to fend for themselves in a lot of different situations and—and we got to prepare them. And what's we're doing. We're—this whole program about—this healthy lifestyle, our Food Network, our garden—it's mostly about the kids, teaching them what they need to know in order to—to take care of themselves and their family.

00:39:54

You see, I'll be gone on. And there's not many of us left that, you know, get out and do this kind of stuff. So while I'm here, I'm going to pass everything I can down to them and not the stuff about the hogs, not the stuff about when I used to drink, not the stuff about, you know, when I used to go out to nightclubs and stuff. See, we have to let our kids know that we haven't been angels either. We made mistakes. And when you let a kid know that—that you—you know say, "Look, I haven't always been like this. I used to be out there at the nightclub. I used to drink

and enjoy these kinds of things.” And they look at you differently. You see, that lets them know that, “Hey man, ain't nobody perfect.” “You know Brother Sullivan used to drink?” “Yeah.” And then you build a relationship, and they trust you. You can talk about anything that comes to you—talk about anything that they want to talk about, especially when it comes to this garden, the Clothes Closet, and the Food Network. Those Pathfinders will be at the Food Network passing out groceries to—to gain points. They have a point system where they have to send into the conference in Huntsville, Alabama, what they’ve done for community service for this entire month and they have to be—get it checked off on. So they’re over there passing out food the second and fourth Sunday.

00:41:33

Every quarter we take food out to the different old folks’ apartment complex. You know where the senior citizens live at? We fix up a bunch of boxes, and we put them on the van, and we’ll take them to Magnolia Manor this time. Then next time we’ll go to the Golden Age, they have a manor at the Golden Age Nursing Home on one side, but they have an apartment complex where the elderly peoples live on the other side. We’ll take those peoples boxes, you see. And that way we don’t miss anyone in the community.

00:42:09

We take care of our kids. We get them clothes, food. We take care of our community—those peoples in the age group who they call the—late bloomers I guess, between the ages of forty-five and—and fifty-five that’s got kids, we’ll get that age group. And then we’ll go into the nursing homes where senior citizens are living in the apartment complex, and we’ll give those guys a box. You understand what I’m saying? We’ll do that. And of course every Sabbath we leave church, we go to one of the nursing homes and we sing. We got a group—yeah, I’m in the

group and we sing. We—one nursing home to the other, we hit all of them. We hit all of them. We're just a community-minded church.

00:43:07

AES: Did y'all have the Food Bank and—and do all of that ministry through food before the garden?

00:43:13

HS: Yeah, we've had the Food Bank—my wife and I started the Food Bank in 1997—1997—and we got it through the Mississippi Food Network, and it's in Jackson, Mississippi. And they give all USDA food free. And they also service daycare centers and feeding sites. There's certain requirements for daycare centers that are government requirements that you have to have in place in order to receive the food. There's certain requirements for feeding centers that you have to have in place in order to receive the food. There's certain requirements you have to have for the community center that we have to receive the food. You have to have a certain amount of freezers you got for a certain capacity. You have to have a certain amount of refrigerators for dairy products, a certain capacity, and you have to record the temperatures of each one of those appliances each day. And you have to send a report in each month of how many people you serve. It's income-based. They have to be low-income. And they have to be a recipient of Food Stamps, and they have to have a minimum income of a certain amount.

00:44:50

So all these things come into play when you're running a fairly subsidized—well I won't say a subsidized, but it's fairly—I would say fairly—well it's fairly well supplied because it's

got USDA food. So there's certain guidelines you have to have in place in order to—to run that operation.

00:45:22

AES: So when you had the opportunity to get this grant from the Delta Health Alliance, did y'all immediately know that—that was going to be something that was going to be a boon to the congregation but also to the community and the Food Bank?

00:45:33

HS: No, we—we didn't know immediately, just gradually we—we got off into how we could, you know, have a part in—with the Food Network, how we could—how the garden could play a role. We didn't have a system in place to where we could just get people's stuff out of the garden. I was—I was harvesting the stuff, putting stuff on the van, and I was taking stuff to the senior citizens in the neighborhood, okay, and they were saying, "How much you want for it?" I said, "It's not for sale. I'm getting—I go by there every—every week I go by and give them something, and they want to pay you for it. But we can't take money for it.

00:46:20

So, it kind of—it kind of burdened me down, you know. So in a sense, they come into the Food Network anyway to pick up their boxes on the second and fourth Sunday, but they—the only thing they had to do was compile a list of whatever day they're going to pick up on, and I'll make sure they had the produce over there. We had cauliflower; we had broccoli, collard greens, turnip greens, purple hull peas, sweet corn. Everybody got an opportunity that we had a half a dozen—we had six ears going with every package of corn. We had a quart bag of purple hull peas going with every box. We had a quart bag of butter beans. This is not a lot, you know what

I'm saying, but we had two bunches of greens and, man, them people are glad to get them vegetables, you know what I'm saying? They had already got a five-pound bag of flour and a five-pound bag of meal, and they had the canola oil. They had everything they needed there to make a meal. Along with the dried beans they'd get along with the canned goods. They got the—they got the green beans, the corn in a can, and they got the sweet peas, English peas. And of course they got the potatoes in a box. This is—this is the summer stuff they have.

00:47:47

But sometimes Kraft will have a bunch of stuff that's about to become outdated, and they'll send it over. Nabisco might have a bunch of stuff that's about to become outdated in their warehouse, and they'll send it over there, so I'm saying—Post that makes the cereal—a lot of big corporations, food producers, they'll have overflow and that will go along with the USDA food, so it's a win-win situation to be able to put some vegetables and fruit along with that, you see. And make sure that they get some nutrients. They get—they get some good grain food.

00:48:31

You know, I drove a truck for a while, and I always had sense enough to make sure on a Sunday and a Wednesday I get a full meal. I just eat little stuff and crackers and stuff but greens, beans, cornbread on a Sunday. The same thing on a Wednesday to keep—keep you regular, you see what I'm saying? And I know if I didn't get—if I didn't do that, how hard it would be on me and—and my digestive system. So I can just imagine what the people are going through, not getting a proper diet and not having the type of roughage that they need to—to help their digestive system to—to operate smoothly. And if the digestive system don't work right, then your liver is not working right because it's got a very important to play in that you know.

00:49:24

All that stuff goes together, so—.

00:49:28

AES: Well you told me the last time we visited, just going back to delivering things from the garden to the elderly in the community, you mentioned a woman who was so happy to see collard greens. She hadn't seen collard greens in a long time.

00:49:42

HS: Oh, yeah.

00:49:42

AES: Can you tell that story?

00:49:43

HS: Miss [Mary Lena] Broom man, she [*Laughs*]*—she's the one that wanted to pay me for them, and I said, "You don't eat collard greens, do you?" "Oh, boy! Yeah, I eat collards."* [*Laughs*] I—I saw her the other day, man, and—at Wal-Mart and she had some—"Y'all got anything left down there?" I said, "No, we ain't got nothing left right now. We planted some greens Miss [Mary Lena]." She said, "Well get them greens on up." Yeah, Miss [Mary Lena] Broom, she lives around the corner and I—she been knowing me all my life. Me and her son grew up together. Her son is deceased now but we—we grew up together over off Broad Street and she's about ninety-two, ninety-three and she—she got those greens. She—she's just crying man, she just—

00:50:32

You know, a bunch of greens, people that haven't had greens in so long that can't get out and move around. Miss [Mary Lena] was at Wal-Mart because her daughter was here for a funeral because, you know, she can't drive and she ain't—she ain't got no people. So her daughter was here for a funeral, and I saw her at Wal-Mart. And I don't even think she got out of the car. But she was just hanging out the window, you see what I'm saying? Hey, yeah, but it—it's a good thing. It's a good feeling to—for those people to see the peoples' faces light up.

00:51:06

And I took some sweet corn over—over to her. There's a place in Leland, Mississippi, that raises sweet corn. And they called me to come over and pick up some, so I went over and got a whole trailer-load of sweet corn. And I distributed it out in the community off of the trailer. And those peoples is—those people is religious people. They're from—they're Mennonites. They're Mennonites and, as long as you don't sell none of the stuff, you can come get as much as you want. And they gave us a load of corn, and then they came back and gave us a load of cabbage. It was about a trailer-load of cabbage, and a trailer-load of sweet corn. *[Laughs]*

00:52:00

When you do good, good will follow you, especially with food, and I found out that—that people are suffering. A lot of people are suffering, and people are making a difference, too. Lots of peoples are making a difference, like the Mennonites over there in Leland. They got a little church school there on the highway—on [Highway] 82 and stuff and they raise corn and raise cabbage. They do a lot of stuff. They—they quilt. They give a lot of stuff away and—.

00:52:35

AES: How did they know about you?

00:52:37

HS: Well they—they got an association called the Gleaners Association, the Gleaners Association, and they found out about me through the Gleaners Association. Someone in the Gleaners Association told them about me because, see, we usually go to Vardaman, Mississippi, and glean sweet potatoes, you know. Vardaman is the sweet potato capital of the world, and when they get through doing the harvesting and stuff, a lot of sweet potatoes will be left over on top of the ground. And I get a church van and get a trailer and we go up there and we—and we just glean them. And so the association is out of West Point, Mississippi, and we have a church member, one of our former members has moved to West Point [Mississippi], so she's in the association. So she keeps me posted on what's going on and where we're going to be and where we're going to be picking stuff.

00:53:34

And so through the Gleaners Association they called me over to Leland to pick up the corn and the cabbage and also picked up sweet potatoes in the same week. Gave them all away; gave them all away, man.

00:53:50

AES: So you're a deacon here at the church but this—the food part of the ministry of the church as a whole seems obviously really personal to you. Can you talk about that?

00:53:59

HS: It's really personal to me because my wife and I, we really started the Food Network but my wife is a high school counselor and it got to be so much on her, so we got two more directors to run it at the Community Service Center, the Shiloh Community Service Center. And it is—it's

just a part of me that—that I just like I say, I'm disabled. I can't do much. I—but I feel like I'm put here for a purpose because my life used to be kind of rough. And the Lord did a lot for me, you know, and I have four biological—I got four biological kids. I got two kids I adopted, and all of them are doing great. I got one that's turning twenty-one tomorrow. She's—she's in nursing school, and she's going to be an RN. And then I got another one just going to be nineteen on the 12th of next month, so the Lord has been good to me. You see what I'm saying?

00:55:08

My two kids I adopted, they're in Atlanta, Georgia. They're doing great. My other kids—I have four that graduated from Mississippi State. And I got two at old Oakwood University now. I didn't—I didn't live right the first—when I got out of the service, you know. I went through a divorce and kind of lost it, but the Lord put me back on track. So He did it for a reason. He just didn't save me and do all this for me for nothing. I can't get around sometimes, you know, like I had the guy with me today planting the garden out there with the planter because I can't do it anymore—my knees are swollen and stuff. But I can shoot from the bed. I can lay in the bed and, not being able to get around some days, and I can get my phonebook. I can call around to these grocery stores, and I can put in orders for whatever they can let me have. I make a list out. If it's oil, if it's—if it's flour, if it's meal—I call all of them. **[Laughs]** And I can get somebody to help me go pick it up. You see what I'm saying?

00:56:37

And if my Pathfinders want to have a fundraiser, we'll make a list of what we're going to do—we might sell spaghetti plates, you see. And so I call one store for the spaghetti. I call another store for a tomato sauce. I call another store for the salad fixings. And I call another store for the garlic bread. You see, I'm just in the bed, and I'm laying down and just on the phone, and everybody is so glad to help these kids out. I fax them, you know, a picture of the entire

Pathfinder Team along with a letter and what we do and stuff, and they know when I call—
 “Herman, what you need now?” You see, they don’t mind helping the kids either.

00:57:23

You got some managers, you know, that go through corporate before they could do anything, and they got to call the corporate office. I said, “Well, you call them. As a matter of fact, give me the number, and I’ll call them.” “No, you better let me call them.” And it teaches the kids how to network. And we say, “Okay, let’s roll.” That’s what we say is let’s roll. So I’m put here for a purpose. It’s for the food and stuff. I make some—somebody said, “Man, you’re going to adopt two kids?” I said—I put one big pot of beans on and some cornbread and one day and I got cabbage the next day and I have pinto and I have greens the next day. I said, “We’ll make it. I know we can because I did. I made it.” And we did that. We did that, uh-hmm. Man them kids love me, man, all of them.

00:58:09

I just talked to one of them when I was on my way down here. And I fed them good. And my grandmamma, we had a truck patch. We—we would work in the field all day chopping cotton or picking cotton, and then we got to come home and chop the truck patch. Or we had an acre cornfield, we had to chop it and, you know, we had to gather the corn up for—and put it in the crib for the hogs. I’ve always been working, and it ain’t never hurt me. I think—I think this—feeding people, somebody got to do it. Yeah, somebody—people know me around here, man. They know I bring the groceries. And I’m not patting myself on the back or anything like that now. I’m—I’m saying I think this is what the Lord wants me to do. I’m going to take care of my family, which is all these kids, show them what is right, take care of the elderly, take care of the widows with their children. Some of these women got children that ain’t got no daddy. And that’s our responsibility—my responsibility as a deacon to make sure they got food.

00:59:39

Sometimes we have to pay bills. Sometimes we have to keep the lights on. You know, we have to do that. Sometimes we have to keep the lights on, and just the other day we had—we had a kid, good kid making good grades going to Jackson State University for the first time. So we put a list out front in the church in the foyer about—list of whatever—everything he needed. He needed everything. And I gave his mama some money, and one of the departments defaulted. I said, “Well take the money out of the Garden Department.” You see, when you got a kid that’s excelling and trying to make it and trying to do something, you got to get behind that kid. You got to be there for that kid. I don’t have time to go get no kid out of jail, you understand what I’m saying? You get locked up, you’re in there. I ain’t got no bail money. You want to go to Ole Miss, I got your refrigerator. I got your microwave. Don’t you worry about those two things. I got those two things, and don’t you worry about that. Now let’s find you a summer job before you go.

01:00:57

You see, this is—this is—this is the—if we’re not thinking on those lines, Barak Obama can’t help us. United Negro College Fund can’t help us. To a certain point in our life we have to be self-sufficient. We depend on us. We depend on us. These—this group of kids we got now in the Pathfinders, they’re going to be some great kids. They’re going to be the kind of kids that go to a nursing home and see somebody and start crying every time they see them and want to be there with them every day, and you got to take them out there every other day to see these people. You understand what I’m saying? My daughter is taking her clinicals, and so she’s started making her rounds at the hospital in the Huntsville area, and there’s this lady fifty-nine years old and she don’t have anybody, and she’s sick and she’s on dialysis. And so my daughter got clinicals once a week, but she’s at the hospital with the woman three times a week.

01:02:03

You see, this is something that you can't buy and sell. This is something that—that you have to live—live that way.

01:02:17

AES: An investment in each other.

01:02:20

HS: That's it. Investing in each other. Now she's been—I just talked to her, and she just left the hospital and said—the lady said, “When are you coming back, baby?” She don't even know this woman. She don't know this woman. But she's there doing her hair and making sure she's—she's greasing her legs. She's bought a bunch of stuff for her. And you see, it makes me feel good. It makes me feel like I did something right in raising her. Her mama did a good job now, too, now. It just ain't me. And the church members, you know, at this church we have little things—let alone food.

01:02:59

Teenage abstinence for our girls; teach them how to set a table; teach them how to take care of themselves, you understand what I'm saying? Girls mess up. We got a prenatal care class to where they don't have to have no baby before they get prenatal care. Everything you got to do—we got a nurse, RN, from out the Greenwood Leflore Hospital, Sister Collins. She teaches them all that stuff. I know sometimes people—parents have problems with that. They got a problem with that but, you know, we don't. We don't have no problem with that. We teach our girls what to expect and what to do and not to do, and they'll be better prepared.

01:03:40

AES: How many people are in your congregation?

01:03:41

HS: About—we got about 200 on roll, and we got in attendance about 135 every week, 140. Some of our—some of our—some of ours are out of town going to school, some of them work in different areas, and the whole 200 are not here all the time. But we got about 200 on—on roll. But everybody on roll has—has a job to do.

01:04:15

Now I'll tell you, Miss Amy, these are professional people and they share—I don't know why—they're professional people, man. I guess because they don't have to work on Saturday. They have to get a job to where they is professionals, doctors, lawyers, or something, but you would never know it. You'd never know it.

01:04:37

AES: So tell me about—the church is almost 100 years old. I wonder if you know of anything in the church's history that involves food and its ministry prior to you and your wife starting the Food Bank in the '90s.

01:04:53

HS: I think food has been a part of this church ministry for—since time immemorial. I think the way I came to this church was through food because I was a hungry lad, and I knew a lot more guys, Mr. Outlaw befriended like that and took them home and fed them and took them camping and did a lot of stuff with them.

01:05:15

Of course we had to come down and work at the church, you know, but Brother Gray, some more people is testifying how they came to the church, and it was the same way I came to the church. My Pastor just left; Pastor Brand just left here. The way he come into the church was he started hanging out with this guy that was Seventh-day Adventist, and he know they ate every time at their church, so he would come just to eat. You see, and then he started going camping with them and he started going places with them, and then after a while they invited us to come to Sabbath because you're over here eating every day for Sabbath. "Man, you better come on a little earlier and come on to church." And so he started coming to church.

01:06:10

Then him and his wife, he sits in the pulpit. Him and his wife were in the streets, you understand me. And his wife started coming to—to church with him. He was still in the streets and coming to church, but his wife got serious and said, "Look—." They weren't married. She said, "Either you're going to stay in those streets, or you're going to marry me." She said, "We got a child." He married her. He had just come out of the Marine Corps, went back to school at Oakwood University and he got his degree in Theology. Then he went to a university in Michigan and got a Masters, and then he got his Doctorate, and at thirty-nine years old he got his Doctorate back at Oakwood, and he's in the pulpit preaching through food, through a meal. That's how important the meal is. It's very important.

01:07:19

AES: So what are your hopes for the garden, the church garden and these other lots that you've acquired recently?

01:07:25

HS: Uh, my hopes for the lots—well, I got small visions. This is a small vision. I need to get some more people to thinking about the gardens, young people, and I got a few I'm working with now. And to—to take these lots that we have—we have three lots—and make sure that we have something on them. The winter garden, the spring garden, we're going to have greens on them in the winter and we're going to have all rutabaga, or we're going to have all turnips on those two spots. On one lot we're going to have all rutabagas, and on the other lot we may have all beets. On this lot behind the church we may have all turnips and the other one we have all mustard. And then on the corner lot we just have cauliflower, collard greens, and radishes and our rutabaga. I'd like to do that. That's my vision.

01:08:34

And to have the people in the community not to throw beer bottles on the lots. “Hey, man, we eat out of this garden. My grandma—yeah, this garden. You're not—don't you—don't you do nothing on this lot.” And become a voice in the community, a solid voice to where people know who you are and who you stand for, and they know they can depend on you for anything they need, especially food.

01:09:03

If we could do this with these lots—now the mayor offered to—to break our lots up last year because she wants to start a community garden within the city. She has one community garden. Have you been to that one? Yeah, the Mayor, Carolyn McAdams, she wants to do the same thing within the city. I don't know if she saw what we were doing in the paper and stuff with me and Miss [Mary] Lindsey. You know, we had the article in the paper and stuff. But since then she—there's a lot of vacant lots in the city, so she wants to do the same thing. I was telling one—one of the councilmen that I don't know whether she could do it or not because of the fact

that you have to really make a statement. People have to know who you are, who this lot belongs to, and that it belongs to the church and—because they will raid it.

01:09:58

The guy who sat them greens on the street, put rubber bands on them and set them on the street, but they belong to the church. I'm not worried about it. Ain't nobody going to touch nothing in this—in this area because we take care of our people in this area. I wish you could talk to that mayor about her vision also, but I think she got it from us. She wants to put lots all over the city, garden lots. She wants to put garden lots all over the city. And I just—I just want to take those lots and make sure we got something on them, and make sure that we can get a system to where we can reach out to—and then don't miss nobody, make sure we get everybody, make sure we get a lot of the kids out—off the corners in the afternoon at these parks and stuff and get them into the garden, you see.

01:10:46

A lot of them don't have anything to do, and they will say, "Well, I don't have anything to do. There ain't nothing to do no more." You can come and raise some food for yourself, and that's what I want to do. Get those kids off the street. Get them in those community gardens on those corners and—and make them appreciate it and let them take their tools home every night, whatever they want to use. If it's a hoe, a rake, or whatever, a fork—take those tools home every night and you take care of them, and when you come back tomorrow, you bring it back with you. When you give them that kind of responsibility, it works. It works every time.

01:11:23

All—all my kids got their tools. I got the—when I—we had a list for tools, and I make sure that I got some for the adults and I got some for the kids.

01:11:35

AES: So if I could go back to the Delta Health Alliance grant, can we just kind of cover the nuts and bolts of what that was? Did that—like how much was the grant and what did y'all need and how did you use it?

01:11:50

HS: Okay. They had a guideline on—on what we could use the grant for. The grant was \$3,000, total. And they gave us a list of what—of everything—they recommended some of the tools that we needed, like a certain kind of tiller plow they wanted us to get. Okay, they wanted us to get certain kind of water hoses. They give us \$79 for it. We got to get two of them. They was \$39 each. Okay, the green mulch, we didn't get the green mulch. We didn't get the black cow compost.

01:12:32

AES: So they had—they had guidelines of what you could get, but you could also pick and choose? You didn't have to do everything?

01:12:39

HS: They—they had a guideline for everything they, you know, they wanted us to get.

01:12:46

AES: Do you think that it was a—a—?

01:12:48

HS: This is our budget here. Okay; it—they wanted us to get two mulch forks, two manure forks, 39-inch long round handle point shovels, spading fork, extended reach weeder, adjustable hand pruner, a bow rake—two of them, even. They wanted us to have six to eight pair of gloves, okay, 54-inch action hoe, like they wanted four of them. Okay, like I cut back on some of the things. I got four action hoses, which was 54-inches, and then I got four for the kids—36-inches for the short handle for the kids, okay. A regular garden hoe was \$15. I got two of those, and then I got two of the triangle-shaped hoes that you dig down and you plant stuff with.

01:13:44

Okay, forest cultivator, hand cultivator, wheelbarrow, this Bolens tiller; well, we couldn't find that tiller. We couldn't—we couldn't find the tiller anywhere. So what I did, I had to order one from over to Lowe's in Greenville and they allowed us \$357, and I think it cost \$269 and so we had some adjustments in there to where we could buy some more stuff, like they wanted us to get two water hoses. I had enough in the budget to get four, okay, enough to get four water hoses and—

01:14:19

AES: So the budget was specifically for equipment?

01:14:23

HS: Specifically for equipment. The high-rise sprinkler, you know, the kind that's on a tripod about this tall that goes around, they wanted us to get two of those. They cost \$89 apiece, but I had enough in the budget, since I cut back on some stuff up here that we weren't going to use, I got three of those. So this—this budget here was a good budget but—but some of the stuff it wouldn't fit in with our gardening, such as the fertilizer and—and the—a lot of that kind of stuff

was real expensive, but we grow all organic. So we don't add all that stuff, and so I saved on that and—and they was okay with it.

01:15:07

AES: And you grow organic because of your food rules in your scripture?

01:15:11

HS: Right, right because of our faith. Okay, this is—these are our guidelines, garden rules and regulations that went along with the grant. Now if you want a copy of that, I can give you a copy of that, if you'd like.

01:15:28

AES: And then you also got soil tests, and you were assigned a Master Gardener?

01:15:34

HS: Yeah, Mary [Lindsey] was our Master Gardener, and we had to get soil tests from Mississippi Soil Conservation Service. And I thought they'd go out and get some soil out of the ground. You know. I didn't know anything about a soil test. This is Mary here. This is our Master Gardener here, Mary Lindsey. [*Pulls out a newspaper clipping written by Mary.*] I didn't know anything about a soil test but, see, what they had to do, if this is your—if this is your garden like this, your garden spot [*uses a piece of paper to illustrate*], they'll take a sample from here, here, here, and here and they do them randomly [taking samples from all parts of the garden plot]. And then what they do is they'll take them and put them altogether, and they cost about \$8 each. And they'll—they'll test the soil, and they'll give you the level of pH, certain ratings and factors

they'll have in there that I don't know anything about, calling for different kinds of fertilizers for the soil, what kind of soil it is and whether it's clay or sandy or—it's a lot of stuff in there that I didn't know anything about.

01:16:45

But it really didn't affect us that, well, one way or the other because we weren't going to use what they—what they was going to be telling us to use anyway. You see, so but it was—it was one of the requirements, so we had to have it done. And, but as far as getting them all like that, we didn't do that. **[Laughs]** We just got one. And went with that because I wasn't going to put any fertilizer or anything like that because, like I said, we grow all organic. Ain't no sense in me putting—if I'm going to put them chemicals there in my body, I might as well put the chemicals—all the other chemicals—caffeine and you know, all that stuff and all so—. But Miss Mary Lindsey was instrumental in making sure that we had some things that we needed. She started us off with our garlic program. Garlic is one of the things we use as a pesticide to keep the bugs and stuff off. It's a natural pesticide that, you know, we was—I talk the garlic bulbs that I raised and put them in a—in a five-gallon bucket and let them sit there and they'll—they'll go through the process, and I just strain them and put them in a sprayer and spray them on the vegetables. No insects nowhere. They can't stand it.

01:18:14

And Miss Lindsey was the one that started me out with that process. She said, “Look, get you some garlic, and you don't have to worry about all them pesticides and all that stuff, since y'all are going all organic.” I said, “No, we don't need no Roundup and all this kind of thing.” And she said, “Just take this garlic and sit it out and—and when they pull it out, you take it and make you some pesticide.” That's what I did. And she's a real good Master Gardener.

01:18:39

AES: So what was it like for you, you know, having, you know, grown up raising animals and raising food with your family? What was it like to get back into gardening with this church program, and were there other people in the congregation who got really excited about it because there had been a long time since they had done anything like that?

01:18:55

HS: They—they didn't get real excited about it at first. They're just getting excited about it because they just started reaping the benefits of it. At first, by it being a community garden, the church members maybe didn't directly participate in doing the harvesting. But this year they did, and they started to contribute to—to the—to the Garden Department. I see where someone put some money in there for the garden the other week here. But you know, they—they weren't too excited about it. They said, "Garden? Why are you doing a garden?" I said, "Well, I've been mowing it now for the last fifteen, twenty years with the lawn mower and won't have to mow it no more at least."

01:19:42

But—but the garden at home, growing up, I always had one. Whenever I got married and moved down on Broad Street, I had one behind my house on Broad Street. So I've always had a garden.

01:19:56

AES: And you grew up just outside of Greenwood, right?

01:19:59

HS: I grew up right—yeah on the south side of Greenwood, but I’m from the country. I’m from Teoc. It’s out on [Highway] Number 7, going towards Grenada. That’s where I was born at over there and—until I was thirteen years old. Then we moved to Greenwood, and I brought the garden with me. You know, I got my shovel and cut up a spot behind my house over on Broad, and I’ve always raised at least tomatoes, okra, onions and cabbage. And then when those ran out, I planted the whole thing in greens. So I’ve always done that all my life. I’ve always done that. I guess that’s why the pastor picked me for this project because he knew I always had some type of vegetables or something all the time. Yeah, so he picked me for it.

01:20:47

But and I’m glad he did and it keeps me kind of—keeps me going. And I’m just glad I can serve, you know what I’m saying? I’m glad I can be a part of—of having someone to—to have better nutrition. You know, it helps you to realize that people are—people are having a hard time. They’re having a hard time. Some of these mothers got three or four kids, which ain’t our fault, but they’re here now and—and somebody has got to feed them. And the federal government can’t feed them. You know? They—they used to be able to get Food Stamps and Welfare and stuff like that. But now you can’t do that. They—they got a program—if you get Food Stamps, you got to be working. And if you get Welfare, you got to be working. So these girls that have these babies around here, man, they are—they’re in bad shape. They’re pitiful. You know, they make you cry. They make you cry. And I’m just glad I can make a difference.

01:21:59

I’ll tell you what I saw the other day, and I cried. I was at the V.A. [Veterans’ Affairs], and a girl come in and brought her daddy in, and it must have been her mother with her. They were poor. And they were poor, and I cried. And the girl had some shoes on, you know how you—the flip-flop shoes that you put your—your toe goes between you know, your big toe will

be in between like the rubber? It had broke. And she was taking one step, and she was sliding her foot—one step and she was pushing him in a wheelchair. My God, I couldn't take it. I could not take it. I couldn't take it.

01:22:49

I couldn't—I had to give that girl some money to get some shoes. I asked her mom, I said, “Can I give her something to get some shoes?” You see what I'm saying to you? I couldn't take it. There's certain things I can't take. I don't know whether—I must be built the wrong way because I can't take it. And she was about fifteen, sixteen [years old], and she was kind of heavy. And one of my daughters is kind of heavy. And man, I just couldn't take that, and they were in there getting—she was not eating. They were making sure he was getting something to eat. He must have got some tests ran or something but it was kind of late—like 9:30, 10 o'clock. They can't eat before they touch the man so—. He must have had his visit down, and they was bringing him by to give him something. He was in the restaurant in the cafeteria. And she came in sliding her feet. Boy that really hurt me. That really hurt me, man, you know.

01:23:51

If that don't hurt you, I don't know what's wrong with you. I don't know what's wrong with you if that don't hurt you, and that's the way I am about food. How are you going to tell somebody that God loves you, and he wants you to come and join his church and they hungry? They can't hear you. I've been hungry. They can't hear you. You give them something to eat. You give them something to eat.

01:24:18

AES: So that is a very poignant note to end on, I think, and you've given me an awful lot of your time here, and I really appreciate your generosity. But that, to me, begs the question of what

you're doing here in Greenwood and what Shiloh is doing here in Greenwood and how it's affecting the community and how this—this Delta Health Alliance grant was for the whole Delta. So there—I think they have like forty churches now who have community gardens.

01:24:43

HS: Really?

01:24:46

AES: What do you—if you think about what you're doing here, and if you think about that happening all over the Delta, what do you think the possibilities of that are and the change that can be made from having a garden and have it be a church-driven effort?

01:24:59

HS: I think—I think that would be fantastic. I think that would be fantastic. I didn't know that—that they had that many gardens around. And with the same concept that we have here at Shiloh? If we could just overlap each other with—with what we're doing, I think it would do something for the Delta that's incredible. I think within four or five years, the impact would be felt—the Delta wouldn't be 48th on the depth chart for obesity and diabetes. I think that the Delta would become more healthier.

01:25:37

Like I was saying earlier, if we could take this community—church—the community challenge all over Greenwood and let it go to Itta Bena, to Indianola, I think it—if these church gardens would—would do the same thing, I think we should—we should get together as church gardens—gardeners. We should get together and—and—and form a vision of where we want to

go with this thing and then we should—we should have some target points to where we can show some reference to—to where we were, what we are, and where we want to go. See then we could see what we're doing. I think we could make a difference in the Delta. Forty gardens. They got forty gardens? Man, that's a lot of gardens. And if all us get together and get on the same page they had to go do—they had the Church Challenge in order to get that garden. You know that, right?

01:26:37

Now if they can do the Community Challenge over there—the Community Health Challenge and we got a Community Health Challenge going, and Greenwood competing against Itta Bena and Itta Bena is in there competing against Indianola and Moorhead is in there, then we're all competing trying to be healthy—what you think that will be like? Man, that would be something, wouldn't it? [*Emphasis Added*] It's just a vision, but—but we have to put something on paper.

01:27:06

If we don't put it on paper then we—we won't never know what we are. We can track ourselves. And put it on the news, WLBG News: Indianola is in first place on the Community Health Challenge. Cleveland come in second place. You see, it's a part of the Delta. That way the impact can be felt like an earthquake. It'll be a rumble in the jungle. It'll be a rumble in the jungle. People won't be going to get this high blood pressure medication. They won't be getting this insulin. Juvenile diabetes will be almost wiped out, and our kids wouldn't be on these corners. Man, the kids would know how to get out and fend for themselves to start a garden right beside their house, even if it's a rent-house. They can raise some tomatoes and onions and—and some cabbage—three heads of cabbage, six.

01:28:06

The Healthy Church Challenge, in terms of the Healthy Community Challenge—Itta Bena, Greenwood, Belzoni, Indianola, Ruleville, Doddsville, all those places got a community—have the Community Challenge, man, and they're competing—will meet up at the coliseum man and give out trophies. Man, can you believe that? We can do that, man.

01:28:32

And look, Mississippi State is on board, and now you guys are coming on board with some stuff. I don't know what y'all got going, but y'all coming onboard. You got me here and got my attention and that's—that's a good because you care. If you didn't care, you wouldn't be here, and that's a good thing. And I'm excited. I'm excited, and I need to meet some more peoples that's got these gardens. I'm going to call them and see who all got the gardens. And then I'm going to try to meet with them.

01:29:00

AES: Oh, I just planted a seed, didn't I?

01:29:02

HS: You just planted a seed. You did. See, and it's all it takes is a seed. You did—that's a good thing you did there—forty more. And I got to give it to you guys, man, and girls because a lot of ladies now can garden, and I'm going to tell you that. My grandmamma could really garden, and my mama could garden, man. They'd get out there, man, and they can garden. Yeah, that would be a good thing.

01:29:24

AES: So the—the Delta Health Alliance, church-driven community gardens, do you see this eventually being as an interfaith thing and an interracial thing, as well?

01:29:33

HS: I don't—I don't know about interracial because of the fact that people that are not of this race do more, as far as our community is concerned, as far as the Food Network, the—the where they serve the food—soup kitchen, Greenwood First Baptist Church. They take in refugees. They do a whole lot more stuff than we do. We need to get with those guys. We need to catch up, you see. Just like the seed you planted, we—we—we should be locked in with—with the Greenwood with the white church because they're doing a whole lot of stuff. They have so many Katrina victims over there, you—I mean black, white, Chinamen, they had everybody over there. You see what I'm saying?

01:30:42

These churches over in North Greenwood have spaghetti dinners every Thursday night. Just bring your family out and have a spaghetti dinner. That's fellowship. You see what I'm saying to you? A lot of things that we do, we're catching up—we're catching up. Interfaith Ministries, who is over the soup kitchen, they're connected with Greenwood Baptist Church. And they do a lot of good stuff. They do a lot of good stuff. The same boy, the singer that's—the boy that went to Jackson State, I can't think of these people's names that are from the hospital, we couldn't hardly get the stuff together. They bought him new briefs, new underwear, new tee-shirts—the white church. You see what I'm saying. Everything brand new. Everything he had brand new, so I think it's just a communication thing. We need to get—we got the same mission. We got the same mission and—and I don't—I don't think it's racial.

01:31:59

AES: Do you think it's timing? Do you think that 2011—?

01:32:03

HS: I think it's 2011. Uh-hmm, I think things—things are going to get a whole lot worse, and I think that these gardens are going to come into play and going to save a lot of people's—a lot of turmoil, a lot of hunger pains.

01:32:20

AES: Well and I meant—I meant as far as timing, as far as, you know the past with Greenwood and being in the Mississippi Delta and how the racial climate has changed, and now that the 21st Century might be the time for those kinds of collaborations to start happening.

01:32:38

HS: Well I—I couldn't answer that directly because I don't—I don't see race as being a barrier when it comes to—when it comes to being a Christian and when it comes to helping others. You know, I was in the military and—and all—a lot of my friends were white, Mexican, and we put our lives on the line for each other. And I haven't changed. And no one messes with me and makes me feel bad or calls me a name, so it doesn't—it doesn't matter what has happened in the past. It—it can't—it can't feed people now. It can't help me pay no bills.

01:33:26

My grandmamma always said, "If it don't pay no bills and make no meals, it don't make no difference." I don't have any—I just don't think on those lines. It doesn't never come up. I treat everybody like a child of God, and if you do that, you'll have a beautiful day. You—you

won't—I don't want to live with problems. I don't. **[Laughs]** I really don't, man. Everybody is God's children, man. We're going to all be up in Heaven, man, running around and flying around and throwing our hands up and just flying around, you know, just flying around, man. And I'm looking forward to it. I'm not looking for any problems. You know, I don't get into politics and stuff like that.

01:34:13

AES: Well all right. Well I, again, have taken a lot of your time. I wonder if there's anything that you'd like to add that we haven't talked about already or a final thought that you might want to end on.

01:34:23

HS: Well I'd just like—I'd just like to say that, you know, I did all the talking today, and then you made the big point, and that's good. Sometimes you stop talking and start listening about the—the gardens, forty more. That's very important for the Delta. That got my attention. And I really appreciate you for that because I'm going to contact those people. I'm going to contact Ryan [Betz, program coordinator for the Delta Health Alliance] first, which is the coordinator for this program, and see if he can give me some names and numbers for those people, and I'm going to contact them and talk to them and see where we can go. How could I help them bridge the gap in their community and—? We'll just be there for each other.

01:35:11

We're starting out right now, but what we'll be in four or five years—I think it's a good start, and I really thank you for that. And I'd like to end on that note—that I should stop talking so much and start listening. I think that's the best thing I could do because I heard something

when you said that, and I saw something that we could do for this Delta by just picking up the phone.

01:35:35

AES: I would love nothing more than to think that our conversation has inspired something else for this—this church and your ministry. So thank you again, Mr. Sullivan, for your time today. I really appreciate it.

01:35:45

HS: Okay. Okay, just looking forward to seeing you in October [for the Southern Foodways Alliance’s Delta Divertissement].

01:35:48

[End Herman Sullivan Interview]